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JAMES
LAFAYETTE
HUTCHISON



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ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR

A NOCTURNE

James Lafayette Hutchison

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A NOCTURNE

1

The night was warm and weighted with a sulky heaviness. Chlo kicked down the sheet one foot after the other. She jerked her body slantwise across the bed and sighed with relief at the delicious coolness of a spot her legs had found, hitherto untouched. Now, she said, and her lips pressed together in a straight line of determination, I shall put everything out of my mind and go to sleep. From the bed on the opposite side of the Queen Anne lowboy came the sound of breathing, slow, rhythmical. Chlo sat up abruptly and peered through the darkness,

holding her breath as she struggled to distinguish the features of the sleeper. She punched her pillow viciously, fell back on her bed, rolled over, drew up her legs, kicked them straight, turned carefully on her side. Now, she whispered to herself defiantly, I shall go to sleep; at once.

One — two — three — four . . . count, that's right, count away. I'll be using Kaffee Hag or trying Ovaltine next. Or some sort of suggestion or will power. They seem plausible. Usually, the more plausible the more lacking in truth. That's a good line. What was it? The more plausi— rot! I'm forever trying to convince myself that I'm clever, that's all. I feel superior to such ideas. Crowds swallow them whole. Therefore, without thinking or questioning, right or wrong, I can't accept them.

Yet it's just like Christian Science or — or psychoanalysis: they all have sound healthy bodies if you tear off all their funny-fitting clothes. But what do I know about it? Nothing. I've never even read the Bible through. And have I ever read a single book on Christian Science? No. I can see things simply, though. Why, oh, why do I keep on that way? Back and forth — hot

and cold. I'm afraid with myself I might be banal. Banal or banal? Ho — not sure how to pronounce it. I'll have to look it up to-morrow — I might start to use it and mispronounce before some one. There I go — thinking always of what others may think about me. Not that I'd ever want to know for the word's sake. Dear Lord, is there no escape? Whoa — what's this? Dear Lord. Bah. When I don't even believe — heroics, pure emotion. Go to sleep. Forget yourself for once. One — two — three — four. . . .

Lonesome. Why do I always feel alone? I can't sleep when I feel lonesome. I wonder if I ate anything. That's usually the trouble. Let's see, what did I eat? Lonesome — it didn't bother me when I was young. Young. That's good. And I just twenty-nine. Old woman. Twenty-nine. Gordon wouldn't have loved me if my body weren't beautiful. Twenty-nine and a beautiful body. That's a funny thing: beauty lasts but my body won't. How's that? Beauty is truth and truth . . . why is beauty truth? Is it? Every day a new truth murders an old one. How can any one believe anything beyond a few scientific facts? I'm thinking all in circles. Facts don't explain lonesomeness. A man lies right there and an old woman of twenty-nine lies here. One million miles apart. I am alone. Alone and for-

sak— hello, that doesn't make sense. He loves me and my body and everything about me. He says he loves me. He acts as if he does. What do I feel? I become irritated, I grow angry. Where's love? I am alone and lonesome. I am married two months. Almost two months. Months and years. Now I'm tied down. A wife. Silly, I am not tied down. But I am lonesome. I was lonesome before. I am lonesome now. Lonesomeness is wanting what you don't want. Gordon loves me. His hands caress. They are artist's hands, long and slender.

Long graceful fingers firm and elastic. Last year when he ran smack into my umbrella and scattered my books all over the wet sidewalk, I recognized his long slender hands picking them up before he straightened and I saw his face. Eight years hadn't changed his hands. He hadn't changed, I thought. Guadella — Guedalla — Guadella said the child is not, except in fables, the father to the man. A sacrifice on the altar of paradox, I said when I read it. I know what he meant. Gordon loves long slender lines. He loves me. Wet sidewalks. . . . I wanted to throw myself into his arms. I wonder if that was repression. We shook hands. Oh, I was physically and mentally glad to see him. I was constrained and I think I turned red. I felt red.

I know it was repression. Cordie always said my words were stiff and self-conscious. Oh — oh — why was I such an idiot? Self-conscious. Repression again. Or was it? I'm sick of Freud this and Freud that and all the jargon that goes with it. Cordie and Willa every night for two whole years misreading dreams and gabbing Freud and repression. Well I did, too. Repression! Introversion! Words. Why should I have turned red? I hate emotion. Yet I'm full of it — inside of me — in spite of me. Bundles of emotion criss-crossing. I can't be different. Every one must be that way. I've never wanted a man but I've always wanted love. I was missing something. Admit it. Admit it. I was just afraid to take it.

— Chlo! It *is* you, Chlo, and you're the first beautiful thing I've seen since I left Paris. Come drink tea and dry out and talk. I want to take a good long draught of you. —

We went to the Biltmore. He halted me in the lobby for an instant and stared at the men and women seated in the alcove dividing their time between scanning every newcomer and glancing furtively at their watches. The morgue, he said, of the dead rendezvous. He laughed silently. Gordon always laughs silently. His laugh is warm and intimate. It seems intimate. It isn't. Funny. I thought it was then. His laugh is like his words:

they are warm and personal. His voice is soft and pitched low. When he speaks he is thinking of something else, of his painting, of my ankle, my breast. I know. Gordon shuts the door to the back room of his mind. Perhaps loving too many women did that. They are all mistresses to him. But I close the window to him on many parts of my mind. Every one closes a window or a door else she'd freeze to death in her nakedness. I'd never lived with a man — except in thought. Why should Gordon and I be the same? Minds can't meet below a certain point. That's it I think. I think Gordon is lonesome too. He has loved too many women and I have thought of too many men. We are not closer than that.

We talked and talked. Gordon talked and I listened. He talked and I studied him and wanted him and was nervous. I wanted him nervously and in a panic. I had wanted some one for so long. My mind refused to follow his soft low words. It jumped away to thoughts of him and I forced it back again and again to follow his soft low words. A gray haired woman and a sleek young man had a table near us. They didn't talk. They danced every dance. They were bored when they sat. I tried to shove Gordon's body from my mind and I looked at them. What did Gordon say? What was it? He

stopped talking and smiled intimately. I almost jumped. He said, she pays him to dance and sulk for her; lots of old girls do; they simply must have their man by hook or crook. I nodded cynically. I felt red again and embarrassed. Not at what he said. I knew that. But when he said it I was trying to shove from my mind the wanting of a man, too. Ugh — she was scrawny. Man — man — man — is there nothing else? Would it have been the same if I'd married Gordon ten years before? Does every one's mind run amuck as mine?

Gordon talked of Italy and his work. Two years of France and six years in Italy! He told of how he had worked living almost on nothing. Studying and painting with barely enough to eat. But now — he was intensely eager about *but now*. His voice glowed. His eagerness stirred me physically. He was so intense and alive. Now he had a reputation. Not a wide one. But spreading in greater, greater circles. But what was I doing, what had I been doing, how had I kept so young and — why you're like an eighteen-year-old flapper, he said, only you're much lovelier than any unbaked flapper could be. I said, *ta bouche, bébé*, and was afraid when he laughed that the expression was too shopworn. Uncertainty. I am always uncertain. I think I've known too many clever

people. They're clever because they're afraid of cleverness themselves and after a while they make their friends afraid of everything too, except stupidity. I'm not so sure. I told him I had done many things since leaving home eight years before. I had returned only twice. Home bored and angered me now. Too many bungalows, too much country club, too much gossip. The girls I had run with were mothers: the profession of Southern women. The men — well. . . . I threw out my hands. I remember that. I didn't say I was lonesome.

I wanted Gordon to think me clever and cynical. I say to myself that I hate cleverness. I say I hate cynicism: the pitiful excuse that sensitive and shallow minds make for their disappointment in life. Yet Anatole France was both clever and cynical, so was Schopenhauer, so was de Gourmont, and Meredith. I don't mean that kind, though. I mean this word twisting and sense twisting, and "he was that kind . . ." "and you know they're like . . ." attitudes and saying something raw and being casual about it. I mean something like that. Rot. I don't know what I do mean. I'm trying to be clever now. Gordon thinks I'm clever.

What was I thinking about? Gordon's smooth skin. No. No. No. We were in the Biltmore.

I was thinking of Gordon's smooth skin. I was not. Yes I was. I don't care. He didn't pay much attention to what I said about home. He asked me again what I had been doing for the past eight years.

—Like almost every woman, Gordon, I've hopped from one thing to another. I thought I was going to be a great writer but the masterpiece is still unborn. I've been secretary to the editor of a woman's magazine and reader on the same magazine. I left to edit a story magazine. A terrible thing. From three to six men shot dead in every story. Then press agent for a movie actor. Now I'm writing advertising. A career of bunk so far, but a life-saver in these hard times. Not all bunk either because —

—Publicity work. Then you can help me pull a few strings. I'm going to need a little publicity here. My income has been shot to pieces. The professionals know my work, but no one seems to be buying now. I'd even do portraits. —

That was a surprise to me. And it hurt. I was casual and modest in my attempt to impress him. I thought he was interested in what I was doing. He acted as if he were deeply interested when I was talking. He looked so intimate. But he was interested in me only as it touched him. His mind had been poised waiting to alight on some-

thing he could immediately attach to himself. His warm smile and grave gray eyes always leave the impression that he is wholly absorbed in me. When he's not. I didn't think of that then. Why didn't I think of it? But what difference would it have made? None. I'm the same as he. So is every one. Do I think of him ever except in relation to myself? Mostly I think of him and myself close, close together. His skin is smooth and clear, not rough and hairy like that of so many men. I would have loved to touch his smooth skin.

—I'll be glad to do anything I can, Gordon. It hasn't taken you long to get back your grasp on the customs of the country. Press agents and machinery. Only a press agent or a reporter can read a newspaper intelligently any more. —

—Please, Chlo, dear, don't be so damnedly cynical. You know what I mean. I can paint. The one thing I can really do. And I've got to get recognition some way. This depression has got me pretty low. And even a painter must live — if possible. But let's go up to the studio and have dinner there. We can't ruin this lovely reunion day without a dinner. There are millions of things to talk over. Oh, how good it is to be with you again. —

His eyes and voice glowed softly, intimately.

I accepted his invitation. It was more of a command than an invitation. All of Gordon's invitations are commands. Gently couched and final, as if to do anything else were out of the question. His gentle finality always appealed to me, made me want to stretch out my hand and touch his face. It appeals to me now when I know it is simply a childish, wilful streak in his nature. And even now it makes me feel close to him. To get close. In mind, in flesh. I felt that hungrily then. But I feel it now, too. Are all women who work and think for themselves that way? Is Cordelia — big striding Cordie with her keen efficient manner and her loud ready laugh, Cordie with her terrible hats and awful colors — is Cordie ever hungry at night? I wonder. Yes, she must writhe at night sometimes, too.

I accepted Gordon's invitation. I had an engagement but did not tell him. I broke it over the telephone when I went out supposedly to powder my nose. Powder puffs and cigarettes; enlightened conventions. J. P. was furious when I broke his engagement. Oh, how much he is J. P. when he is angry. A big baby playing hard at grown-up. His anger ranges through carefully planned stages. His clients take it seriously. It makes me contemptuous now; it gave me a warm motherly superior feeling then. Over the

phone he was surprised, just perceptibly hurt, froze up and was haughty, climbed down and was pleading, threw aside reserve and was "plainly frank", ended curt and frigidly polite. The same technique he would use on a client. I loved it then; it was amusing. He was so serious and his mind so young. Sometimes I hate him. He plans everything. Every time he proposed I thought of his flesh and the touch of his coarse heavy skin. Why does that affect me? Most men are made with coarse hairy skins. He's so horribly successful. He gets the best seats at shows, the best tables at restaurants. It pleases him. He expands. I like good seats and tables too. What a baby he was. And still is. And so many, many of him in the world. But, oh dear, sometimes I do hate him. When he hung up on me I laughed.

In the telephone booth I stood for half a minute without moving. Curious, how often I recall that. Stage fright? The uneasiness of anticipation? A pleasant tingling sensation mixed with a vague dread. It shoots through me now to recall it. Oo — oo — I love it. So often I've had that feeling. At night when I imagined a man taking me in his arms. At a melodrama in the middle of the second act. Sometimes discussing psychoanalysis with Cordie and Willa. I stood at the phone booth and wondered what it would be

like to caress Gordon's skin. Gordon had been in my thoughts so much during the past few years. More each year. My thoughts? No — my dreamings. I started back to the tea room. The switchboard girl called after me, hey lady you forgot to pay. She mumbled under her breath. The jerk back to realities embarrassed me. But the tingling and dread did not disappear. At the entrance of the room I stopped and pretended to search in my bag. I took a deep breath and scolded myself before I had the courage to join him. Why am I like that? Why? Why? There was no reason. Yes there was. I wanted him. I had imagined myself with him, many times in many ways. Now he was here — near me — flesh and blood to touch — and to know. I was glad and I was very much afraid.

In the cab Gordon held my hand. We were laughing and talking rapidly, interrupting each other. I hardly realized he had taken my hand and was holding it. He did it naturally. The naturalness, the intimacy gave me a comfortable glow. Suddenly the thought struck me that only long practise and habit could have taught him to take my hand so naturally and beautifully. And I was flooded with anger. Anger that stabbed me. Unreasonable jealousy. I took my hand away as if to reach for my handkerchief.

And as suddenly my anger turned against myself. Of course he had held hands — thousands of times. I! I who pride myself on my broad-mindedness, on recognizing life's facts. Don't be a fool, I said to myself, face such a simple fact as this. You've held hands with many men and kissed them. The only reason you haven't lived with any is — well — you were afraid. Is there anything else? No. Curiosity held in leash by fear. I've never had moral scruples to bind me. Why should I have been jealous? Could my imagination already have taken possession of him as of my own property? I slipped my hand back into his and was ashamed.

What a surprise was his studio. I had seen so many — ranging from cheap garrets littered with odds and ends of furniture, broken down sofas, battered chairs of different periods, stools and tables, with dust bedraggled drapes and stacks of sketches, old magazines, all confusion — to the carefully thought out untidy richness of successful portrait painters. But Gordon's was new to me. It was like his hands, his long slender fingers. Clean. Scrupulously clean and neat and ascetic. He is not an artist but a scientist who paints and dreams — a sensual ascetic whose Christ is beauty and passion. I am sure he is. Two straight-backed Carolean chairs, an easy

chair by a standing lamp, a plain oval drop-leaf table holding a few books and magazines, a few canvases in one corner, his big easel in the center with a small stand for palette, jars of brushes and tubes of paints. Bare floor, half light. Dull-orange walls — their bareness broken by the one surprising spot of vivid coloring, that sketch of bathing women. An austere room. In some intangible way sensual. The sensuality of a monk's cell. The austerity of violent dreams. A place of visions. I wonder if the strings that draw men into monasteries and women into convents aren't held by sensuality? Ecstasies and visions. Physical austerity. Aren't they the consummation of sensuality? I could become a nun.

I sat back in his big easy chair and half closed my eyes. I was tired. Very tired. The strain kept running through my head and would not stop: what is it like to love a man — I want him — I want to feel the touch of his flesh — I want him. He filled my thoughts, imagination, and it left me weak. He talked steadily, as he arranged the oval table for dinner. As he passed me on his trips back and forth between his alcove bedroom and bathroom and the table, he would reach over and lightly brush his beautifully shaped hands over my hair. Once he leaned over for a second and one finger lingeringly caressed my cheek. It took

away my breath. I wanted him to take me in his arms and I was deathly afraid he would. The waiter came with the tray of food and I sat up. We talked. I listened. I only half listened. Some of the things he said I heard. But they were far away. He talked of what he was trying to do, what he had done, his plans of himself. Himself. He talked in a low, soft voice. I was thinking of what it would be like to kiss him, to have him. I am not sure of what he said. Sometimes I would hear a sentence, two sentences. He talked. I thought of him. I wanted him. I was afraid. Fear. How many women are held back by fear? Pure fear with morals in the discard? Millions. If they are honest. I'm not alone. I'm like other women. Emotions are not different. I knew it was foolish emotion — fear — and yet time and again it stopped me. Fear of what? Fear I can't define. Fear that won't let go. Gordon's words flowed on, soothed and caressed me; his large gray eyes shone in the candle light; at times he leaned towards me eagerly to emphasize, his eyes grew larger, shone more brilliantly, danced out of his floating face, confused me. Emotions scrambled through me. But one emotion flings out high above the rest. It is the flute in "l'Après-Midi d'un Faune" winging its way above the low tones of the other instruments.

The remaining instruments whisper fear and dread. I sit wanting him and fearing him without moving. And he talks.

—I shall be great. Great, Chlo, do you hear? I know what I can do. I know the feeling of power to paint. Nothing can stop me. Nothing can get in my way. Not women, not money. . . . How many real painters have we to-day? Six or eight perhaps. No more. They rush, they try to skip. You can't skip, Chlo. Or they fall back on imitation. To-day they all talk glibly about expressionism, subjective realism, subjective idealism, sur-realism. A few years ago it was *impression* — with its lame drooling offsprings: post-impressionism, cubism, futurism, vorticism, dadaism, and what-not. A lot of *isms*. Most of them are mere bags of tricks. Tricks of technique. Impressionism was leading us into decadence—a passing phase that always rides the waves of new movements. But it drowns itself in the end. True, it was a great discovery that there were actually brilliant colors in the world and that they could be transferred to canvas. Monet and his coterie gave something to art, of course. But after all, Cezanne and Renoir are the only two painters of the last hundred years who have advanced painting one step forward. Do you know why? Because they were searching for more than tricks

of technique. They were searching for motives. Some critics call it "significant form" others say, "expressionism" — this hidden *motif* that makes a painting. But they are beating around the bush. All painting has always been expressionistic to some degree and also impressionistic to some degree.

— Here's the whole point. In the days before Christ every nation from China to Greece had its gods — the central point of men's lives, their beginning and their end, their existence. And these gods were the *motif* of their art. Then the Christian religion planted the seeds of a new *motif* — seeds that flowered into the greatest period of art the world has yet known, culminating in the renaissance. The *motif* of one god and a mother and her son who suffered. And from the time Luther flouted Rome and tarnished the surface of mystic faith, artists have been chasing will-o-the-wisps. Sometimes hit, sometimes miss. Take Rembrandt's marvelous old girl paring her nails and then look at the smug burghers he turned to. And look at the regularity of the despairing returns to the classical — so called. And, oh lord, the running around in circles to find a new formula to take the place of the church. First came romanticism! Back to nature just as so many to-day preach the primitive. And then the

reaction to reality — or the myriad of little details they mistook for reality. And of course what should follow but impressionism — the most natural revulsion in the world from petty realism. And the world grew sick of them all — the classic, the romantic, the realistic — a tired world into which decadence crept and bred cynicism and chaos. But a passing phase. The day of decadence is ending. Do you see what I'm driving at, Chlo? I've got the answer. That's it. And it's too simple for words. That's the reason it's overlooked so steadily. Cezanne had it, probably without knowing it. It's the same mystic faith that was born with the cathedral. That's all it is. But now it must do without its god and Christ. We must rename it. What? Rhythm, I should say, the rhythm of both harmony and discord; the rhythm that science is at last bringing us; the rhythm of evolution and the interlocking of all sciences into one; the rhythm that people once sought as god. Do you see, Chlo? Do you see? Learn from the masters of Italy, when they were moved by the rhythm of faith. Learn from those who saw straight and simply and nobly. But carry what you learn into to-day. I can paint, Chlo, do you hear? I shall paint. It's my one mistress. . . .

Slender, graceful hands. Ascetic face lit with

shining eyes. Yet appealing and sensual from head to foot. It is peculiar, the faint aroma of sensuality surrounding this confessed martyr. *Fin de siècle* and *Confessions of a Young Man*, flashed through my mind. And all through the evening afterwards, I remember *fin de siècle* coursed back and forth, a gentle chant across my consciousness. But they never fit: his words and himself. I see him always with the beautiful hands and great soft eyes of the Christ of El Greco. How I could have loved that Christ. El Greco must have been half woman to see him so clearly and truly. A Christ who is a dreamer, a neurotic, burnt with passions until he must cry aloud over the sharp pain dealt him. The pain of suppressed passions. It must be these, to make leaders and drivers of such men. Gordon and his cry for honest painting. They were men, those fifteenth century painters, he said. He is slender and graceful, and almost effeminate and he felt the manhood of these renaissance masters. He found there what he was not. Is that it? Is it? They cry for something that cannot be? I think so. For a moment I glimpsed the inner life of Christ complete and whole. And it passed. They always pass, these moments, and I can't recall them, they were never in words. Moments lost before they are found. But Gordon. . . . I wanted

to weep. I wanted to—I choke now. I won't. I won't.

He is beautiful in the candle light. He ruffles his hair with his long artistic fingers. He leans towards me and grips the arms of his straight-backed Carolean chair. He jumps up abruptly and strides back and forth two or three paces. He is beautiful in the candle light. He throws himself on the arm of my easy chair, stretches out his long legs, drops his left arm across my shoulders. I shrink at the touch. And recover. I want his arm there. It makes me tremble. I want him so much. But I'm afraid. He is abrupt and quick and surprising in his movements. I don't know what he will do next. It frightens me. He is making love to me. This is the prologue; he is preparing to make love to me. I am sure of it. I feel it is an instinctive game he is playing. It frightens me; and angers me because it frightens me. I don't know how to play it as he does. I've never had men make love to me in this gentle roundabout way. I wonder if Gordon knows, I wonder if he knows himself how much of a game he is playing when he plays it. I've never been sure. Does he work up his moments or does instinct give him the thrill of real emotion? Questions. Always doubts and questions.

— You are lovely, Chlo, he said casually. You were lovely as a young girl. Nineteen, weren't you, or twenty? That was a funny time. George! I was head over heels in love with you, wasn't I? But then I doubt if I ever got over it completely. You were in my mind so much such a long time afterwards. I was determined to show you. That made me work like the very devil. . . . You were so right, Chlo. But you were so damned clear headed and superior it made me boil. It's taken me years to reach the maturity you had then. . . . The same serene Chlo, just as beautiful as ever. You were a darling to give this evening to me. I think I've missed you during these years. . . . I know I have . . . very much. . . . It's so good to have you here now. . . .

He leaned down and kissed me on the forehead. Just a light touch. But it did something. What? It was confusion, dizziness. A delicious feeling. But all the dread in the world was behind it. I jumped up. And we stood facing each other. I had had the same curious feeling before. But not of this strength. I wanted to drop on the floor and lie there. Give up and lie down and forget everything. I was weak and trembling and could hardly hold open my eyes. It was delicious and dreadful. Gordon took a step toward me. His eyes were shining. Differently. I could not think.

I tried to. I was beating him off but my arms were motionless at my sides. I knew what was coming. I wanted to stop him and I wanted him to come. His arms were around me and he was close against me, from his face to his ankles, pressing closely against me. He pressed his half open lips against mine. And we stood there. How long? I should have fallen had he released me. We stood there. I don't know my feelings. I like to recall it . . . oh . . . oh . . .

Gordon gently seated me on the edge of the chair. He was on his knees beside me. One of his hands grasped mine and the other stroked my face, gently. . . . His voice was hesitant, gasping, slow.

—Stay with me to-night, Chlo. I shall love you so beautifully. I love you, Chlo . . . very much indeed. Stay with me and let me love you. You are beautiful, Chlo . . . I've loved you so long . . . so very, very long, Chlo . . . my dreams . . . I love you . . . I will love you so beautifully. . . .

Perhaps his words were vaguely reminiscent. I don't know. They were familiar, cut and dried as a formula. He did not speak them as a formula. The undercurrent was formula. I seemed to have gone through it all dozens of times before. I hadn't though. Why should I feel that way?

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I wish that I had stayed. I would like to have it to recall. I wish that I had stayed.

I left. He let me go. He was gentle. He kissed me good night. I wish that I had stayed. I wish, wish, wish that I had stayed.

2

Chlo lay flat on her stomach, her face buried in the pillow. Her body was stretched out rigidly straight. Her hands were clenched tightly. For a long time she lay in this tense position, unyielding as a rod of steel. But almost automatically exhaustion forced her into complete relaxation, and with a sigh she turned over to relieve the discomfort of her strained neck. From the nearby bed heavy, even breathing continued monotonously its slow rhythmic course.

Sleep. I must stop this sort of thing and get to sleep. I'll feel rotten to-morrow morning. One

— two — three — four — but I wish I had stayed. I wish — day dreaming at night. This resolve to put aside dreams and go to sleep. Pushing aside the resolution and deliberately calling up pictures. What a terrible thing it is. The same monotonous routine as a Ford employee pulling the same lever all day long. Where did I read about lever pulling? Havelock Ellis. Havelock. A stern name. It goes beautifully with a white beard. No. Not Havelock Ellis. Chase. That was it. Stuart Chase. I wish I had stayed with Gordon. I wish — I won't. Stuart Chase and Ford workers pulling levers and going to the movies. I never did finish that article. I must finish it to-morrow. I won't though. I never finish articles. Books either. I pretend I do. I can talk about them. But I never finish anything. Why should I? Where would it lead? Things move so swiftly and it's so hopeless, so utterly hopeless. Like J. P. and his radio. The drivel he listened to night after night and never tired of. I think it's the wheels going around that pleases him so. And it makes him feel "modern" to know all about new gadgets. He can't really like that rot. But it only bores me to think of mechanics and watch wheels go round. What *do* I want? I want, let me see, I want — I don't know what I want. I've never known. This road

and that and a few steps down each grow tiresome. I can only come back again and again to love. I don't believe in it but I can't leave it. Damn. What an assinine mixture. But I wish I had stayed. That's a lie. I don't, really.

The joy I actually might have had could never match the idea of what I think it might have been. I don't believe it could for it never has.

But oh, he was beautiful that night. He was such a beautiful living lie. As I am every hour I'm awake. He was so impassioned about his art, so tender and tense in his plea of love. He was honest in both when he was talking and acting them with such fervor. But they were lies just the same. Perhaps at bottom we understand each other. I become excited over this or that. I tremble with convictions. I speak rapidly believing every word I say. Lies. Afterwards they are lies. Later I question the thoughts and emotions I had when I was speaking; and I find they were lies. All the time I was really in the background watching myself and wondering. Gordon with his slight body and his slender graceful hands. He makes believe with his talk of masters who were men and he believes when he talks it. But oh, Gordon dear, I am like that too, and darling, what misery you must suffer at times. Rare times. For we are nimble minded and

juggle our ideas of truth very neatly, we make-believers.

Yes. We understood each other from the moment I recognized his hands grasping my bundles on the wet sidewalk and he glanced up at me. Even at that moment I felt him mentally and physically. I wanted him then.

But that night when I left you. When you had closed the door of your studio after me. And in a daze I walked the two blocks to Broadway for a taxi. And the harsh brilliance of the electric lights and crowded streets. People jostling and lights. What a curious quality of dream. My face was hot and I shivered. And at the curb I stood staring—how long?—before I remembered that I was there to stop a taxi. The crowds flowing past, the motor horns, the flashing signs, I recall now so vividly. For then they played tricks with me. They were all in the distance, miles away, only faintly then, and I stood alone with my face warm and my body cold and every incident of the evening flying through my brain at breakneck speed. Yet even now I smile at the overlapping thought that whirled into the midst of the others, when I came to and finally held up a taxi. If, I said to myself, it had been any other man in the world, he would either have thought to phone for a cab to call at the door or gone out

himself to fetch it. The thought lost itself in the maelstrom of my mind and imparted a delicious warmth. It was a part of your sweet selfish self, Gordon, to forget. It gave me a closer understanding of you and only made you dearer. For I, too, am like that. Unselfish, consciously; but at bottom, my dear, my dear, how bitterly thoughtless and selfish we both are.

All through the night I lay wanting you. Neither asleep nor awake, but tossed back and forth between the two. Exquisite torment of emotions. Without thought or even active wish. Only a kaleidoscope of rapidly shifting scenes. Gordon and I. Fragments of his speech. The feel of his kisses. That is when love surges through one. In the night when it is black dark and one is alone and imagination rules. That is when the full force of love is felt. It is the tragedy of life, of my life. That the most exquisite realization of beauty should come only as an epilogue—a monologue of the imagination when the play is finished and the lights dimmed. What a ridiculously tragic world. Or do I merely make it tragic with my own self-pity? Cordie always said, tragedy, my eye, only idiots who refuse to face realities are infected by tragedy—ha! tragedy indeed, only repression gives birth to tragedy. But Cordie is crammed with Freud

and Jung. She eats and drinks them. If she felt the tragedy of life she would immediately manufacture a complex as the cause and her admiration at her own introspective skill would drive tragedy out of existence. Everything is sex, she says. I don't believe it. Not everything. I'm not sure what isn't; but not everything. It's the biggest thing but it can't be back of everything in life. Not everything. There's something somewhere more than merely birth and life, something more than procreation and conception. What is it? Where is it? In art? In music? In business? In religion? In none of these. In longing and lonesomeness for something that is not? No. No. These least of all. There, where I would leave sex behind, it stares me in the face and leers at me. Year after year it has grown bolder and leered harder. I can't fight. It is like fighting thin air, only it does not dissolve or give ground.

Why couldn't I do like Cordie and Willa? I respect them. Every one I know respects them. Why couldn't I have torn loose from the hands that held me back and have had a lover too? Conscience. Damn every day in the centuries that has added its brick to the wall of conscience. Damn them: damn them. I want to be myself — not my ancestors. And I can't. Or is that true? Willa says not. She says the right food — the

right vitamins — will go a long way to overcome ancestors and environment. Willa and Cordie: McCollum and Mendel against Freud and Jung. Willa, slender and dark and intense, with her soft persistent voice, straight lines, straight suits, and her beautiful legs and ankles; Cordie big and almost shapeless, brilliant and loud, without one jot of taste in clothes or hats. Such hats!

— Mind, Cordie, I don't run down psychoanalysis: but I do object to the way you try to hang every mental abnormality on some absurd repression. You try to trace all human ills — both mental and physical — to some repressed instinct. Have you never wondered why it was that such extremely slight incidents or actions should so often be the start of complexes? —

— Yes, but, Willa dear, they only look small to you after they are laid bare. Almost all of our actions start from some small beginning that makes no conscious impression at the time, that may almost seem irrelevant. If we are to maintain any mental freedom and independence —

— Independence, nonsense! The way to freedom, mental and physical, is through the proper vitamins. I tell you, Cordie, the greatest advance in science in the next generation will be in dietetics. McCollum and Mendel are the first

men to dare dream of the vast importance diet plays in biology and evolution. Nine times out of ten low vitality and nothing else causes repressions. And low vitality of that kind comes from our diet. Food, you understand Cordie, our daily food. It'll put your psyche stuff in a back seat. You wait — heredity and environment will have a sister. Some of these days evolution will include heredity, environment, *and* diet. And diet will be the biggest of the lot. Diet and behaviorism, that is. McCollum says —

— For heaven's sake, let up on McCollum. It may be as you say, Willa, but you certainly have no facts. And Freud has advanced every step of his way on case after case. And he *is* pointing the way to mental freedom and independence that's going to dress this old world up in a lot of swell new clothes. So there, dear. —

Independence — how Cordie and Willa love to argue on independence. What is independence? What has it really always been for me? A yoke. A yoke, in fact, that has always driven women into marriage — and men too, I imagine. Independence is the worst prison the world has to offer. That's a good line. A very good line indeed. Ugh! I *would* say that. But it's true nevertheless. How I wanted Gordon that night! And yet in spite of every fibre of me wanting

and willing—I couldn't. Something held me back. Something has always held me back; something that's down inside that isn't me; something that is habit and fear and early training—ideas belonging to dad and mother; things apart from me owning me as a slave yet never belonging to me. And I never had the courage to dispossess them. No. That was not it. It's the outcropping of others in me. More and more I recognize in myself some weakness that as a child I saw and hated.

Those days together with Gordon. What a delicious thrill of tender love and fear they held. But the next morning I am tired as if I had not been to bed and the back of my head ached. The bare ascetic studio with its one brilliant painting against the dull orange wall. Gordon with soft glowing eyes, slender caressing hands, arms and body pressing against mine. They were of the past, those things. Another girl had been there and it was a long time ago. Bathed and dressed. Cordie talking and joking, her strident voice harsher than usual, grating on my nerves. Overnight the cosiness of our three rooms turned to crowded and stuffy cells. Civilization and culture! Three college graduates in three little rooms where the sun struck only one window. *American Mercury. Nation. New Republic. Review of*

Psychoanalysis. Freud and Jung. Morand. O'Neill. France and Gourmont. Faulkner and *Madam Bovary*. *Point Counter Point*. Dewey. *Behaviorism*. Stuart Chase. Blake. Masfield. Millay. Frost. *The Newer Knowledge of Nutrition*. On and on. Scattered books with scattered thoughts. Like a symbol of my life staring me in the face that morning. Impossible to stand it there with Cordie and Willa and those books smothering me. I left without breakfast and walked a roundabout way to the office. That far off dream of Gordon and the evening before in the back of my head and throbbing — throbbing — without letup.

How maddening the office. The steady clack-clack of typewriters thrusting against the dull throb in the back of my head, intensifying it. The strangeness of the room. The noise and hurry without meaning. Why this rush, rush, rush day after day all for a few pages in magazines and newspapers? Trick pages with countless tricks behind them leading readers into traps; soap box hawkers disguised as gentlemen strolling down the avenue or as ladies over their tea. All to squeeze out one more sale. Drop. Drop. Drop. Like the strain of drops of water steadily dripped on a man's head until he succumbs. The steady drip of a story until the reader buys. And all

this tense struggle to find the story, to find the right clothes to dress it in, to cut a perfect fit, to send it forth to smirk and flirt and make its conquest. Research, statistics, investigations, merchandising, copy, layouts, art work, plates, proofs. Serious grown men worried and worn over a shade of blue in a drawing; desperate over a word in a headline. Like children playing adult. No. I'm not fair — unless we are all children, all playing away at this grown-up myth. Aren't lawyers or doctors or politicians or writers and artists all playing with their mud pies in the same way? Aren't they all bustling and worrying and working their little tricks much alike? Is there any difference? Aren't they all thinking about their personalities and trying to impress each other? Women are even worse. I do it. I do it most when I am most ashamed of it too. And I am flattered when I do impress. It's all so silly. Not always either. But oh, how drab and futile it was that morning with Gordon beating against the back of my brain. I wanted to think and I couldn't think; I wanted to make up my mind to give myself up to him. I repeated to myself panic-stricken, I will be his mistress, I will be his mistress, I will be — and I was panic-stricken because I knew I couldn't. I knew it and madly fought to escape from the fact that was a part

of me. Oh, God, why, why have I always been like that?

When the phone rang it was a shock that took my breath. It must be Gordon, I thought, and had to take two or three deep breaths before I had the courage to answer. His voice was soft and cool drifting through the phone. I could almost see him before me.

—I simply had to call you up and say good morning, Chlo. I hope that I haven't broken into a busy conference. That's right, isn't it? Conference? That's the word in this busy country, I understand. —

I couldn't hear his laugh over the phone, but could feel it and see it; the warm silent laugh that is so personal. Yes, he would be amused at conference. I did not answer. I waited.

—Anyway, I was suffering, waiting to hear your voice again, Chlo. I wanted to be sure that last night was real. You have been with me ever since. I say, is it all right to talk like this over your phone? —

—Yes. It's perfectly all right. A — a splendid line. Go on, Gordon. —

—Well. I was wondering if we couldn't be real fussy to-night and dress up and all and dine in style at the Colony and on to the theatre afterwards. Please say yes, Chlo dear. I — may I say

this, Chlo? — I feel — it's difficult to put into words — but I feel — well, Chlo, you're just like an inspiration dropped right from the sky. I really must see you. Won't you? —

Over the phone! Gordon is an artist. I was no longer tired and my headache was forgotten. He is an artist in making love.

— Of course, Gordon, you know I want to see you too. And I'll be delighted. What time will you call? —

An inspiration, he said. *An inspiration*. And then doubts and misgivings. Was he really falling in love with me? *An inspiration*. Or was it merely another affair for him? Another affair to be cloaked and finessed and artistically garnished? *An inspiration*. How often, I wondered, had he built a campaign around inspiration? Advertising is not alone guilty. All campaigns are built around catch-words. That big signboard that used to stand over Hill's Drug Store slapping each passerby in the face with GET RIGHT WITH GOD. What a horrible way to sell religion. What messy things we are. Love has its catch-phrases too. *An inspiration*. It was so beautiful before that. It was still beautiful. But the sweetness of a new song was haunted now with too familiar strains creeping in from the past. I didn't care. I wanted him, I

wanted him to take me in his arms as he did the night before. I wanted him, I wanted him. And the fever of excitement and the uneasiness of intangible emotions stayed with me through the day. Dread. Dread almost choked me. The fights that I've had with dread; the battles dread has won from me. Dread of the humdrum of marriage; then the dread of passion; then the dread of giving my body to a man; the dread of conscience. Then the dread of not giving myself to a man; then Gordon to awaken all the dreads anew.

Shall I forget? That evening while I was dressing the idea swooped down on me. Marry Gordon. Marry him. Of course. Oh, dear. Even as I thought of it the idea also struck me that Gordon would never, never in the world ask me to marry him. And how funny that was. How peculiarly, terribly funny that was. It was so funny it hurt me all over. I sat down on the bed and laughed. I was an idiot. I don't see now what was so funny and so tragic in that thought. I laughed until I thought my heart would break. Cordie was scared and called me names and said, what's it all about? Don't be a hysterical ass. Dear old Cordie. I could only look at her and laugh with tears running down my face. She sat down on the bed by my side and put her arms

around me and called me a sweet utter idiot and a precious damned fool. And then I cried. I cried from shame. But when I was laughing I felt like crying. Damn it. Thinking about it now makes me choky. Such an idiot! Stop it. . . .

I finished dressing. But dread now played with a new idea. And if he only wanted a mistress — if he refused even to think of marrying — then what? What a child emotions make of you even when your whole brain cries out against them. But who knows when intellect begins and emotion ends? Perhaps after all it was my mind forcing me on, and perhaps it was emotion rebelling. Thought and emotion: they are Siamese twins surely. One would die without the other. J. P. always says to clients, let's put aside our own wishes for the moment and look at this problem cold-bloodedly and logically. Then he unlocks every emotional trick he has in the attempt to sell his own desires. How can I or any one else even think logically when we always have some wish or desire at the end of it all? I want my wish and I'll have my wish first and try afterwards to prove it logical. Oh, lord, I'll go crazy if my mind keeps up this silly merry-go-round. It doesn't make sense. I want love. Everybody wants love. And that's all they do want. If sex

is such a terrible thing why do men always begin talking and suggesting love as soon as they get a woman alone? Why do women spend most of their time thinking about their faces and their clothes? I do. Cordie and Willa do. My mother did and she was even afraid of the word, sex. Sex novels. What novels aren't sex novels? A man wants a woman. A woman wants a man. I want Gordon. And I'm afraid. What I feel and what I think fight. *An inspiration. An inspiration.* Gordon is an artist.

I had never been to the Colony restaurant before. The soft gray tones, the uncrowded space, and the cool quiet, the whole atmosphere soothes and rests and invites intimacy, confidences. We sat in an alcove and talked softly with long exquisite pauses. It is the mood of the place. Gordon stroked my hand and played gently with my fingers as his low voice warmly enveloped me. And his words were impersonal. He spoke of recent books, of his painting, of the sea and of the colors of Italy, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which he worshipped, of the theatres and critics, of French cooking. And his words were impersonal. He was thoughtful and sweetly formal. Through the evening his manner never changed. Gordon is an artist. Peace hovered over me and penetrated through me, soul satisfy-

ing peace. Not even the regret that it was passing touched me. Once only during dinner after a silence Gordon bent over and looked closely into my face with his soft dancing eyes. You are an adorable person, Chlo, he almost whispered slowly. You are understanding and fine right through.

He stopped. We were silent awhile. And that was all. Gordon is an artist. How I loved him at that minute. I wanted him so that I ached with it. A thousand things rushed to my lips, trembled there and dissolved. And I was happy. What an exquisite torment of feelings. It was as if I stood on the brink of a precipice and looked down and down through space into beautiful scenery below and with vague uneasiness felt the thrill of an almost invisible desire to let myself float out into this wonderful space. I was happy. Gordon was beautiful in the shadowy alcove with his quiet warm voice and his long slender hands. I was happy. Marry me. The low sweet strain of my imagination. So low and so sweet. Marry me. Was this passing through Gordon's mind also? Sooner or later, my imagination repeated, he will ask me to marry him. He has thought of last night. I was quiet and happy.

Romeo and Juliet. Oh. Oh. Could anything

ever have been lovelier? Only a woman on a balcony making long speeches to a man in the shadows below. But what a grip it has. Gordon took my hand and held it. After that act I raved. I talked rapidly hardly knowing what I said. Some of the pent up flood boiling in me since the evening before broke through and gushed out. Gordon never said a word. He looked at me with great warm eyes, half-smiling. Gazed steadily. What a fool I am. Suddenly I was embarrassed. I flushed, I am sure. I felt self-conscious under his warm gaze and broke off and looked straight ahead. Gordon fingered through his program. That's all my mind is good for. Recalling little meaningless things that I may worry about them afterwards. Forgetting big things, remembering petty ones. Rot! Why am I like that? Will I never grow up?

We went to the Rendez-vous afterwards. Seated near the entrance high against the wall I silently gazed through the smoke of the low ceiled room at the noisy vacant crowd. A bedlam without meaning. Dancing that was not dancing at all, only the slow thick movement of a tired, drugged mob. Dancing so crowded and slow and graceless that it was not even sensual. Merely ugly. And every one—seated or dancing—looked weary and bored or tipsy. Beautiful dresses.

Weary or drunken with weariness. Why do they go there? Stay there? When they are so tired and bored. What a change from a moonlit balcony to this blatant, ugly, jazzy room with its nightmare of white faces. I felt superior to this crowd of—of sheep. I've never been back. Would I feel ordinarily the superior disgust I experienced that night, I wonder, or was it the mood with which the Colony had haloed me, which a balcony scene had intensified? Anyway I felt superior. Gordon—sensitive Gordon—must have shared my feeling. He, too, was quiet and silently listened and gazed. Was he thinking, I said to myself, as I was? Of holding me in his arms? Of kissing me? Of asking me to be his wife?

Even in the taxi on the way home we hardly spoke. Gordon placed his arm around my shoulder and snuggled me close to him and held my hand in his. I was happy. So little it takes. I was happy. I love you, I repeated to myself, I love you, and we will marry; you will ask me to marry you and we will be happy; I love you. Life seemed so clear and simple that evening. Sometimes it seems that way and for days afterwards I try to recall it, bring it back. But the clearness is banished. I wonder over it, but it never returns until ready. What was it Profes-

sor Parkinson told us once about Nietzsche? That no one could see simply and clearly for long without going mad. Yes, that was it. I shall never go mad. I should be the sanest person in the world. Mixed. Mixed with wants and fears. Love. I was happy and saw clearly that evening.

Gordon followed me inside the door to say good night. He took my hand and we stood facing each other. He raised my hand to his lips and held it there an instant.

— Please kiss me good night, Chlo. —

I leaned against the wall. He raised his hand gently and tilted my chin and kissed me. I wanted him to say, marry me, I wanted him to say, marry me. I was wishing, trying to will him to say it. I waited, weak with waiting. And he said nothing. He looked at me for a long time. Seconds? Minutes? It seemed ages and I was weak with wishing and waiting before he stepped forward and tried to force his arms around me.

— No, Gordon. —

Waiting. Wishing. Willing. Now he will say it. I want him. I want him. I can't let him take me in his arms yet. He must say it. He *must*. I want him.

— I'm sorry, Chlo dear. Forgive me. You are adorable. You've given me a wonderful evening

ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR

— good night dear — you know — I think I love you. —

He raised my hands again to his lips and was gone. Oh Gordon, Gordon, you are a finished, beautiful artist in the world of making love.

I was happy. I was sorry and glad by turns that I hadn't let him take me in his arms. Sorry for fear he might feel that I was a smug little puritan. Glad because it might enhance my value. I was happy. Sooner or later he would ask me to marry him, I said to myself. I was sure and I was happy. I loved him. Or did I love him even then? Was it not merely my longing to be close to some one pitched on a high key? I was happy. Sooner or later he would ask me to marry him.

3

Chlo lay comfortably relaxed on her right side. Forgotten were her surroundings, the dreary heat and the late hour; forgotten was the sleeper and the sounds of his slow, heavy breathing from the other bed. Her wide-open eyes stared unseeingly into the darkness that enveloped the room. She lay without movement.

Day after day Gordon phoned. Evening after evening we spent together. Almost a month of sweetly melancholy days and quietly happy evenings. Cold and windy Sundays at deserted Long Beach or Asbury Park or Port Washington; or

Sunday afternoons rambling through lower New York, now stricken with prolonged silence by the dumb upstretching of these grim, graceless structures, their wretched ugliness distorted into beauty by their very mass and the emptiness surrounding them. How I hate them with their crowds. Then I am lost under their shadows. They make tiny, grubbing, hustling ants of us. But with Gordon and the silence they are beautiful. Big and ungainly and beautiful. Standing on the customhouse steps Gordon swept out his arm before him.

— It is the silence, the peace and quiet, he exclaimed, that turns it into art, Chlo. We call ourselves civilized. You can't have civilization with noise. The two are directly opposed to each other. We are going about it all wrong. Here we are crying for democracy and all the word seems to have meant so far is the equal right of men to see who can shout loudest and longest. Civilization means harmony. It means quiet and leisure to think in and work in. Civilization connotes an appreciation of art and beauty — of life itself. You can't get the real beauty out of life with noise drowning everything about you. You can't look at a painting or listen to music or even think straight and simply with all the crashing and banging we live under. Chlo, I tell you we

will never begin to be civilized until we start out to conquer noise. It's the hideous curse of our age. Running a tram is a far greater crime, old darling, than mere straightforward murder. And how we love to fool ourselves with this mad rush and bustle with which we perform our petty little duties from day to day. Hurry, hurry, skip through the traffic, don't wait for the cop's whistle, a minute may be lost. And what's the hurry for? Follow one of them. Watch him push people out of his way, only to stop at last to chat with some other ass for an hour about his radio or motor car.

— But that's a lot of bunk I've made you listen to, isn't it, Chlo, dear? Things are as they are and all we can do is to sidestep gracefully what we hate, what? It's wonderful right now anyway. And you are here and I take your hand so and kiss it so and it's all very wonderful. Therefore and ergo, darling child, the rest can jolly well go hang. You are truly, truly adorable, dear. —

He gazed down at me softly with his brown eyes half closed and twinkling. He still held my hand in his. I have never in all my life wanted anything as much as I longed for him at that minute. My heart pounded and I could hardly breathe. If he had taken me in his arms then and there I would have made no resistance. I wanted

his lips pressed against mine. I wanted him all close, close to me, a part of me. What was it? All the sadness—all the—the melancholy of the world swept through me.

*A Single Sob of Pleasure,
A Single Pulse of Pain*

Pain. Pain that was exquisite torture. Welling up in me. Indefinable. *A single sob of pleasure.* Without meaning. Without thought. The world was a floating cloud and Gordon and I stood alone hand in hand. A thousand captured emotions fought for release, struggled to burst their bonds. A thousand thoughts raged for speech and yet I had no thought. We stood alone without moving. Gordon patted my hand, his fingers caressing mine; something broke within me. I turned aside my head, for tears, I knew, were stealing into my eyes. Gordon saw but did not speak. He started to, hesitated, stopped. Was he on the verge of asking me? I have wondered so often. I wonder now. I suddenly felt tired and chilly. I said, let's go. We drove to the Brevoort for tea. I remember that. For a long time we neither spoke. I kept thinking, soon he will ask me. He *must* ask me. He knows that I will not give myself up without marriage. Or does he know? He has known many women, made many conquests.

Why don't I ask him to marry me? Afraid; that was the trouble, the haunting uneasiness that stole through my body at the thought. And he had me guessing, too. He had never tried to force me since that first evening. What was he thinking? I couldn't tell. Perhaps he was drifting towards the idea gradually. I would wait. A little while longer, only a little while. I could not stand the tension much longer, I felt. What a fool I am!

So often the memory of that day returns, a high-light my thoughts of Gordon can never avoid. Yet such a futile memory. For it is loaded with regrets of what I might have done and might have said when every fibre of my being cried out for him, for the close physical touch of his whole being. The return of that desire rushing over me makes me shiver and squirm now. There we were flesh speaking to flesh, clearly and with the perfect understanding of all nature. Yet all the time our mouths were pouring forth words that were millions of miles removed from what was in us. Did we both not know the tricks we were so lamely and haltingly playing? Each waiting and watching the other. Why do we have to play with life this way? Who tells the truth? Who dares? I don't. I know no one who does. Cordie makes a pretense but her

honest bluff heartiness doesn't always ring naturally. Yes, you too, Cordie. You hide many things your dearest friends will never guess. And you, too, Willa darling. You say I'm too introspective and sensitive, but what do you fear and hide, angels? I know. Cordie and Willa are not happy girls. No one can eternally play with their minds and bodies and be happy. You get tired of thinking in circles and life becomes meaningless. And you can't take up religion. If you've thrown it aside too often you're ashamed after a while to pick it up again.

And you get lonesome. Horribly, unspeakably lonesome and there's nothing to tie to. And life's hell when you're lonesome in that way. No matter how many men and women you know. It just doesn't pay to try to think. It makes you old and lonesome. And I'm so lonesome now. There I go again! Self pity. Have I no shame to myself? Is it all drawn from what others may think? I tell Cordie and Willa I'm like this and that and I feel thus and so. And I believe it when I tell them. I tell them that life means to me independence in thought and action without human strings to tie me down. And when I'm alone I drop into self pity. But life stretches out so pitifully empty and monotonous ahead. Why should that be? I'm not old. And

yet — yet — I feel old. I feel as if there is nothing in the world can bring me any happiness. Old? Twenty-nine is not old. Life may be holding in wait a thousand joys for me. But I can't convince myself. I still feel old and the future still seems empty and useless in spite of what I try to think. I've felt this way before and it didn't last. Why can't I put a stop to it then? Every time I feel it will last all my life. But I know it won't. Even a cool morning to-morrow and my white sports suit may drive this all from my head as if it had never been there. Then why in heaven's name can't I stop it now? I can. Any one can do anything if she will only keep at it. Let's see now. I won't think of anything. It's worse than stupid to keep this up. I am going to sleep. . . .

Day after day you phoned me at the office, didn't you, Gordon? And evening after evening we spent together. During the day I was restless and irritable. In the evening I was expectant and uneasily happy. Waiting in the cold daylight, trying to foster nerve to ask Gordon to marry me. Dreaming in the evening at his side, expecting — expecting what would not come. Pitting my resistance against his. And my work suffered and I was unhappy. Cordie would say, you look and act like the very devil, Chlo. What the deuce

do you keep this up for? Now don't be an ass about this big-eyed painter friend of yours. He isn't worth it, dear.

—Don't be silly, Cordie. I'm not and you know it. I'm just tired, perhaps. That's all. —

—Whistle that to the birds, darling child. Are you in love with this beautiful male? —

—Who? Gordon? Certainly not. He's simply darned good company and takes me to a lot of nice funny places. And he really is entertaining. —

—Yes? Well, it was foolish of me to ask. I know you're in love with him. All right. All right. But please let old Cordie say this, sweet: you can't keep this sort of thing up, or I'll be waiting on you as nurse at your bedside. Look at it squarely. Either take this young fellow on as a lover or marry him. Of course you could stop seeing him altogether. But you won't, dear, you won't. So there you are. —

—But Cordie, don't be silly. You're taking an awful lot for granted. I'm not in love with Gordon. —

—All right, darling, all right. But think over what old Cordie had to say. I'm speaking with old Freud right back of me. Freud says —

—Cordie, if you start Freud on me I'll leave the house. —

Dear old Cordie, I wish I *had* told her everything. I couldn't tell her. She makes me feel such a babe in arms when she gives advice. She's so matter-of-fact and casual about the most intimate things. She claims it's because she's healthy-minded. I think it's because she's so strong and has so much energy. And besides I don't believe in taking emotions and throwing them on other people's backs. I don't want any thrown on mine and I'm not going to throw any on the back of any one else if I can help it. Sometimes though I wish I could. But Cordie made me feel so little when she said, be his lover or marry him. If she only knew how I wanted to be his lover. If she only knew how I suffered because I couldn't bring myself to it. To live with him in dreams — to make love to him in my imagination — to let my conscience or whatever fool thing it is hold me back in real life. What — what — what damned irony!

Then J. P., so solicitous and sympathetic. I had been working too hard, he said, I needed relaxation. Every one should get plenty of rest and exercise and relaxation. His sympathy had the familiar ring of *How To Take Life On High* or *Why I Am What I Am To-day* — the daily newspaper capsules of cheer to put pep into American citizens.

— Now, Miss Harding, this won't do at all. Not at all. Frankly, I'm afraid that *Delise* has knocked you out for a bit. It's no easy thing to pull a lot of good fresh selling copy on face creams these days. You need a change — a good rest for a while. And, by George, you deserve one. You've done a — er — corking job, Miss Harding, a corking job. But we all need a change every now and then. Relaxation. That's the way I keep my grip on things. Work hard but play hard. You're a woman, Miss Harding, and frankly can't stand the gaff like we — er — hard-boiled men. Now you just knock off for a week and go away. Eh? You'll come back feeling great. —

— It's awfully kind of you, Mr. Mitchell, and I appreciate your thoughtfulness. But I truly don't need a rest now. I'm perfectly all right. If you don't mind I'd rather stick and see this campaign through the proofs. —

— Pride of workmanship, eh? Well, it's a great thing, Miss Harding. That's the spirit that carried us through this depression. I — er — I wish you would let me take you out to dinner and a show some night this week. You must have been sticking in close lately. You've turned down all my invites now for weeks. You know — er — frankly, Miss Harding, I prefer your com-

pany to that of any woman I know. How about it now? —

I turned him down as I had a dozen times since Gordon bumped into me on the avenue. Lately J. P. had become irritating to me. His mannerisms. His hale-fellow sparkling eye. His er — er and his frankness. His aroma of success. I compared him with Gordon. I pictured him kissing me and holding me in his arms. I shuddered. Against my will I compared his blunt, stubby hands with the long, slender, graceful hands of Gordon. The thoughts I let myself live with from day to day! Would the idea of dining at the Colony ever have entered the head of J. P. of his own accord? No. Plenty of lights, a full-sized orchestra and a table in full view of all the room. Restaurants with wide reputations where the chances were greatest of being seen and recognized. Shows that would not mar the serenity bestowed by a comfortable dinner.

— These sex problem plays and these out-of-the-way abnormalities that two-by-four playwrights try to force down our throats — what does it get you to see things like that? Those sort of upsets don't enter the lives of decent people. The best we can do is to forget such things anyway. I go to the theatre for amusement. Give me a good clean musical show or some thriller.

That's the stuff for me. That play *Mourning Becomes Electra* and nightmares like that. Dyspeptics writing for dyspeptics. Those morbid plays only fill people with a lot of ideas they're better off without. —

How it irritates when I put down his ideas side by side with those of Gordon. Even now. Those of Gordon seemed so much — so much broader and more civilized.

—A great play. Gordon said. It's certainly loaded to make you think twice. I like a play that has some subtlety and depth to it and a play that tells you something. And the beauty of it's pure classic structure and old Greek formality.

Yet when I see the two opinions together now which is the saner? J. P. wanted plain amusement. Gordon wanted amusement too but through the medium of intellectual subtleties. Oh, be frank about it. I enjoy the plays that J. P. defends but a shame goes with my enjoyment. I'm disturbed by the thought that I ought not to like them. They ought to be beneath me. Yet I like those too that Gordon likes. They give me more pleasure really than the others. They raise my self-respect. Vanity, I suppose. Snobbishness. I don't care. I'm glad I can get more enjoyment out of intellectual problems. If there are ugly things to face in this world, why not face them

fairly and squarely. But J. P. said that seeing them on the stage or in books was going out of your way to uncover them. That angered me dreadfully. He's so sure and practical. And he made it so hopeless to argue with him. Beside the exquisite subtlety of Gordon his ideas have always seemed almost uncouth in their blunt bareness. There were times when I hated him for it. I simply couldn't go out with him. Whenever he entered my mind Gordon was there to meet him and overshadow him and magnify his — his blatancies. I could not see him then in other terms. Gordon filled me night and day. My whole being was saturated with him. Before, I had desired a man; now it was one man. Before, I had been able to fight off man in the individual; now I was almost helpless. Wanting. Wanting. Wanting. Wanting. Would he never ask me to marry him? Would I never have the courage to ask him? The torment of those questions. This quiet, gentle sweetness that he poured over me. It was almost unbearable. I could not penetrate it. I waited. Not for worlds would I ever let any man torture me that way again.

Let's see. How long did this go on? Two months. More. And then that evening in his studio, his lovely, low-lit ascetic cell. We had sat tensely through *Alien Corn*. I was aflame,

swept off my feet. Gordon? I don't know. He must have been. It must have been the turmoil of his emotions that led him to lean over me after the second act with his breath warm against my ear and say, Chlo, please come up to the studio with me after the show. I've something awfully important to say. I nodded my head in consent and a gust of passion swept over me. I suppose it was passion. A hot streak shooting through me, leaving me limp for a moment and almost trembling. It was the same shock that passed through me that first evening when he took me in his arms. Is that passion? The descriptions I've read and heard of love and of passion are so unlike what I've experienced. You can't describe such things. Words won't fit them. I can realize; I can recall; I can go through it all again; but I can't tell myself what it's like.

We drove to your studio, Gordon, and we were both buried in our own shut-off world. Would he ask me now? I wanted to escape my own questions. I looked steadily through the window. An electric sign. Eddie Cantor in his new ——. Flash on, flash off. Would he ask me now? Would he be a funny actor if he weren't a Jew? Jews. Would Jolson? Durante? If he didn't ask me, would I ask him? Hush. A cop. A big tall, upstanding man. Can you really tell a hotel

detective by his feet? If he doesn't ask me I'll ask him. I will. Brown stone fronts. Brown stone — two — five — all the same. They were standardized then as much as we are now. I will. I will.

Oh, dear. How silly things are at a distance. To remember so clearly after this length of time. Or am I remembering? Or dreaming? Incidents stick with us. Their importance has nothing to do with it. But Cordie would say any incident must have been important if we recall it afterwards. Freud again! I was waiting for Gordon to ask me something. Oh, yes. Marry.

Gordon steps ahead of me into the studio and lights his severe standing lamp, throwing the big, semi-bare room into a gloomy haze. That ascetic, sensual room. He tiptoes back and carefully closes the door. I stand waiting. By the door back against the wall. Waiting. My heart is pounding rapidly. He turns towards me. His face is pale and his eyes shine even in the gloom. I am frightened. I know before he reaches me — before his arms stretch out. Marry? No. Not yet. Not yet. I must not. I must not. Oh God, I must not. Hours have passed in less than a second. His arms are around me. Chlo! I am struggling. He hurts. I can't breathe. His face is against mine. His lips pressing, devouring,

dragging across my face. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. Panic gives me strength and I fight without uttering a word. I wrench loose from him. Panting and staring at each other as if we were strangers. I am exhausted. Trembling from head to foot. I lean against the wall for support. My heart is pounding. Pounding. My head whirls. His kisses are still moist on my forehead, my lips, my neck. Words come in gasps.

—What are you trying to do, Gordon?

He drops on one knee, takes my hand, presses it tightly against his face. My ring digs a hollow in his cheek.

—Forgive me, darling. I love you. I adore everything about you. I couldn't help kissing you then. I had to, Chlo. You are burning me. You're a fire that has been blazing in my breast since the afternoon we met on the avenue. Please, dear, don't look like that. Come here and sit down. Please. I won't do it again.—

He leads me to his easy chair. Gently with his arm around my waist. Images fly before my eyes. Again he takes my hand between his two and on his knees he leans against the arm of the chair, his head near and the soft warm tones of his voice are almost a whisper. The appeal of his voice, of his nearness, smother me in their embrace. I want to take his head and hold it close

and hard against my breast. He speaks. And his words come slowly, with pauses, as if he is choosing each one from a platter piled high with many that are desirable.

— Chlo dear, this can't go on this way. We are not in swaddling clothes. We are not two innocent babes in the woods. And we can't go on and on playing with our emotions as if they didn't exist. You know I love you very dearly. And surely you must—you must reciprocate to some degree. You couldn't go with me day after day this way for two whole months unless you had gathered together some few fragments of love for me. Love is a beautiful thing, darling. The only satisfyingly beautiful thing in the world. It's much too big to spoil. So let's not spoil it by playing with it this way. This flirting back and forth. That all belongs to children, Chlo. It's no game for us to play. Love means so much more. And we are missing such a terrible lot. We have so many things in common. We like to see the same things, do the same things, go to the same places. Do conventions bother you, dear? No one need ever know. Besides you've often said you don't care what people think. Don't you remember? Why, you told me that ten years ago even. You don't want to marry. You've never wanted that. And you used to say that

you never would. What is it then, dear? Don't you love me? I'll be so gentle with you and I do love you. You know that. Is it because I've loved other women? I want to be honest and square on that score. I've been in love before with but two women in all my life until now. I've had other women. True. It's in the very roots of my nature. I can't do without them. But I was never untrue to either of the two women I really loved. And they are dead loves now; they have left my life completely. But believe me, Chlo, never was my love for them of the nature of the love I lay at your feet. They were mad passions. Physical fires only. And I worship you, Chlo. There's something big and fine about you that almost scares me sometimes. I worship you and adore everything about you. Chlo, darling, don't let's pass this by. We can't keep on this way. The beauty, the most exquisite beauty life can offer—and I shall love you so gently. Darling. Darling. I can't go on without you.—

He leaned over and buried his head against my shoulder. I could not help it. Instinctively my other hand reached over and caressed his hair. All the fire had gone from me, leaving me all still inside and warm as if a glowing ember radiated a gentle heat around my heart and through my body. For a moment I was years older than

Gordon. And a pity that was deeper than love stretched out to him through my hand as it caressed his hair. A pity that was more exquisite in its tone than love alone could be. A pity that was love and more than love. Pity that was all-embracing peace reaching into every nook and corner of me. The joy of it. Rare and perfect. My head was clear as morning air and mentally I was holding him in my arms with his head tucked against my breast. For an instant I have known a mother's love for her child.

— I do love you, Gordon. I love you very, very dearly. More than I can put into words. I love you so deeply, dear. I think I can realize something of what you have been going through. Something of the same thing has been coursing through me, too, Gordon. I'll be frank, Gordon, as I've never been frank with any man. I want you to know the truth as far as it is in me to see it. It's hard to say what I want to say. I'm groping for words that will make you understand. I can't give myself to you, Gordon — unless — unless — you marry me. I can't —

— Marry! But, Chlo, you don't mean that — why I thought you —

I interrupted. He was on his feet now staring at me with wide-open eyes. He looked so funny standing there gaping at me that I could not

resist smiling. A man off his guard is never but a small boy. I could afford to smile now. Waiting tears my heart and soul to pieces. And most of my life I sit waiting. Sometimes I see time leering at me like a dirty old man. One whom I would like to reach out and spit on and stamp on. But anticipation gone and when the awaited to-morrow is now, there is a let-down. Peace steals in and my mind is calm. The perspective is gone and with it goes something else. What? How many I have loved at a distance, painted pictures around them and myself, imagined them with me in their arms. And then when my dream bumped into the reality. The disgust that intruded against my will and made me fight off their kisses and embraces. The let-down of reality. The fading of the dream. The calmness and coolness that invades. What is it? What? But the image I hold of Gordon now was not that. How did I feel? Peaceful and calm. Yes, all of that. But no disgust. Never any disgust with Gordon so far. He is different. He is so — so — clean and smooth and his eyes and mouth and hands are so nice. I still wanted him as much as ever. I must have or I wouldn't have answered as I did. Then how in the world did I feel? A big fairness. That was it. I felt I was being bigger than myself and was stirred to calmness by my

own pride in the fact. Meeting a man on his own ground. What a silly fool I am. But I don't always fool myself. I know. Of course I still wanted him—but the grand gesture of staking all and telling all.

I *am* a messy idiot. No wonder I could afford to smile in such a superior way. I felt so old and wise. Good Lord!

—Wait, Gordon. Listen to what I have to say. I'm proposing to you, dear. I am asking you in the simplest and straightest way I can to marry me. Please, please, dear, don't interrupt me yet. I know it's shameful and absurd. But I want you to hear me out.

—I'm asking you to marry me, Gordon, because I do love you so much and I don't want to give you up if I can help it. But I can't give myself to you as your mistress. Why? Don't ask me, Gordon. I've tried to answer that question for the last two months. Did you think for a second I didn't know what you wanted from the beginning? Wait, please, dear. I want to tell you why if I can find any words to do it with. I know what you are thinking. I don't blame you one bit for thinking I'm—well—you know what I mean. I've fought with myself night and day since we came together two months ago. I want to give myself to you. I'd give my

right hand if I could. My mind tells me that marriage is all silly rot. It's—it's just a word, just a word out of the dictionary. And we've tacked all sorts of meanings and scares to it. But—but—Gordon, can't you see? Can't you see? Don't you understand what I'm driving at? I *can't* be your mistress. I can't. There's something won't let me. I—myself—me, Gordon—won't do what I tell myself to do. Crazy? Of course it's crazy, dear. It has no meaning. It's a dream. A mad dream. But I can't escape, Gordon. I've dropped all pride, dear. I'm stripping myself bare before you. I want you. Marriage means nothing to me. Then why? What is it? Heredity? Environment? Fear? I don't know. All three. My mother. My grandmother. I'd almost give my soul to—to—to throw myself into your—arms. The future seems impossible without you. I've thought of that and suffered that thought a thousand times over you. And it's a battle I've always lost. For three years, Gordon, after I came to New York I deliberately shut men out of my life. They were in the way of my ambitions. I shut them out and I wanted them terribly more and more all the time. I've never lived with a man. Both the girls I live with now have lovers. Otherwise I act as they do. I think very much as they do. But I *can't*

give myself just off-handedly to a man. When I wanted to give myself away and tried to—I—I—simply couldn't. I'm telling you this because—because. Why, I don't know really why, dear. I want you. I want you with every nerve that's in me. But Gordon—Gordon—I want you to marry me. You *must* marry me. I can't do without you. I can't. Can't you see, dear . . . can't you understand. . . .

Chlo's body was half raised from the bed as she rested on her right elbow. Her right hand was tightly clenched and her left arm was stretched straight down her side with hand clutching the thin nightgown into a knot against her thigh. She craned her neck forward with such intensity that it trembled slightly and her blank gaze remained unwinkingly fixed on a distant spot that did not exist. From the next bed came a slight groan and the dead silence was disturbed by the muffled noise of a body changing its position. Chlo did not hear.

I hesitated for breath . . . and words . . . and sudden sick revulsion. Was that my voice? That piercing high-pitched wail? My own words still echoed through the dull glow of the big room: they pounded against my ears; they seemed detached from me, to belong to some third person, some one unknown to me. I glanced down startled to see my arms outstretched . . . my body bent forward out of the chair . . . tense . . . shame . . . I leaned back . . . dropped my arms in my lap. My hands jerked when I clasped them and I held them together with difficulty. Wisdom? Where now was my role of smiling calm? Of the wise benevolent mother? Am I one girl or two or three? How many people am I? One minute I have a superior smile for a weakness in a friend; weeping the next minute over that same weakness in myself. Mother's old habit of looking at one out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head when answering, how irritated and furious that used to make me. Now Cordie and Willa tease me about glancing from the corners of my eyes. And it's like stamping me with a red hot iron, it makes me writhe. The things I hate in others are always cropping out in me. How I loathe heroics; and yet there I was almost crying and screaming at Gordon, imploring him to marry me. As I talked

I had lost all bearings. Terror had seized me. At the end I was not talking. Terror was talking through me. Horrible, nauseating, panic-stricken terror. It came from nowhere. It struck me in the face, tore open my mouth and ripped words out of me. Words I had not dreamed of saying aloud; words that even now seem never to have been mine. Yet there they were. Pleading and imploring with a man to marry me! Naming the price of my body when the strongest desire of my life was to yield it to him. More than naming the price, demanding it, screaming for it like a — a drunken woman. And why? Because — because — because some stone wall stopped me. Because, great God, I can't do what I want most to do in this world. I never was in command. I never have been and never will be.

Gordon pacing up and down. Never stopping, never raising his eyes from the floor. Pacing up and down. It was ages before he spoke. I gradually settled into dull stupor. My thoughts no longer held together. I thought of a thousand things. I thought how funny my hands wouldn't keep still, of the stern knot of hair mother used to wind about the back of her head, of the slow rhythm of Gordon's footsteps, of a headline that made me want to laugh, of the peculiar shadow the easel threw down the room and up the wall, of

Gordon's hands, of myself waiting for my destiny — Napoleon and destiny and Gordon pacing up and down getting ready to declare our destiny. Of a thousand stupid disconnected things. I can imagine what a moving picture must be when run backwards. Up and down. Up and down with his hands in his trouser pockets. He stops beside the table and lights a cigarette. Up and down. Why doesn't he speak?

Softly and evenly, almost caressingly: I'm so dreadfully, dreadfully sorry, Chlo; I mean for what I've done, dear. I'm — I don't know how to say it — all inside I'm just down on my knees kissing the hem of your skirt. It must have cost you an awful lot to come out frankly at me like that. It was big. It was probably bigger than I can even realize. I can see it — vaguely — but I can't realize it fully because — well — well because I'm not built to fully understand your point of view, I suppose.

— I've been all sorts of a fool, Chlo. A damned big fool. I only hope you can forgive the way I've been acting. But I wasn't flirting dear. Don't think that for a second. I've loved you and admired you all along. I love you right now more than I thought I could love any woman. Please believe that. Won't you? I love you, Chlo — so much that it hurts. When I asked you to

be my mis— my — to be mine I was asking with all the love and respect any proposal of marriage could contain. Probably with a great deal more honesty than most marriage proposals contain. It's just a point of view, I think. That's all.

— You see, Chlo, my philosophy of life has worked itself out so far along one straight line. I don't believe in marriage. For myself I mean. I don't want children. And I can't for the life of me see any other good reason for marriage. That sounds cold-blooded, doesn't it? I don't mean it that way. I don't feel that I'm cold-blooded anyway. But there are some people made for marriage; there are others who aren't. The idea of marrying a woman and then settling down in an apartment or home — raising children — falling into a little group of other married couples — all doing the same thing in the same way — all traveling around in a little circle — losing all edge to their thoughts — forgetting how to think — why it gives me the cold shivers even to think of it.

— For marriage becomes a habit, Chlo. There's no escape from that that I can see. They all go the same way. It's the natural thing — the first instinct of all — for a man and woman to — to mate. But Chlo, I simply cannot believe that it's the natural thing for the same man and woman

to hold their love for each other through years of close intimacy. To me it is taking every bit of the meaning out of life. It's throwing away the only real freedom any one possesses.

—Am I rotten selfish in saying all this? Perhaps I am. I believe in selfishness. I've never yet seen anything done or said by any human being that wasn't selfish. I'm not trying to be cynical, dear. I think that people should be selfish. It's the only way anything ever gets done. Every one is searching for happiness in some form or other, whether you know it or not. I'm selfish about you. Because I love you. Your face, your figure, your gestures, the tiny curve of your lips where they meet at the center, the line of your ankle, the unexpectedly sudden way you break into a smile, the way you glance sidewise from your eyes. They all give me the most exquisite pleasure. Just as the way you talk. Everything about you keeps me in a continual state of longing for you, to be close to you, to have you for my own. For I see happiness there. Everything seems useless and pointless without you. But isn't that selfish? It's all because it gives me happiness. I'm no worse than any one else about it. I see it and admit it. That's the only difference. I can see a picture of us together getting out of life the greatest joy it can give. I can see the joy

to me of showering love and tenderness on you in a thousand ways. And that is the greatest beauty in all life, dear, the unrestrained love of a man and a woman.

—But such beauty can't go on forever. It is not *made* to last forever. It's too lovely and exquisite. But it's worth more than all the monotonous lasting things of the world combined. You do understand, don't you, Chlo? I want you this second as much as any man ever wanted a woman in this world. I want to take you in my arms and cover you with kisses. God, if you really knew how much I do love you and want you. And I can love you as you should be loved. There are not many men in this country who know anything about loving a woman or who think of her side of it — of what will give her most joy or what irritates or hurts. They see their own side and that's enough for them. I know. I've talked to enough men and women to know how damned beastly and stupid most men are with women. Some men wonder a bit about the woman's side but most of those are afraid or ashamed to ask. Very few men know how to make love; if they're satisfied themselves, that's the end of it. Some women marry and never find out the difference; they finally get a divorce. Then they say men think life is just made that way. Others are

more sensitive. They become so overwrought they finally get a divorce. Then they say men are brutes and take a dislike to the whole species. I know. I've heard them.

—And I know this too, Chlo, that the way I love you or the way you love me can't last *indefinitely*. It's bound to drift into something else as time goes on. Not necessarily hate; I don't mean that. But it would grow eventually into a monotony that we would both always regret. I'm an artist. It's my whole life and means everything to me in the long run. Right now you mean more to me than art or painting or anything else. I'm glad of it. I want you to keep on meaning that to me. But I believe marriage would spoil all the beauty of it. It would be a millstone around the neck of my love; it would make my painting a secondary affair, a means to a living, a way to rent and respectability only. Respectability! What a word!

—Chlo, dear, I'm putting up all the arguments I know to make you take me without marriage. But I don't want to persuade you into anything you'll be unhappy over the rest of your life. I want you to see my viewpoint clearly and make up your mind from that. But I would love you so beautifully, Chlo. My whole aim is to make you happy, to give you all the beauty I

know love can give. Let's don't think of throwing it away for marriage.

—I can't give up my freedom. It means too much. Do you remember what you said to me that time years ago, Chlo, about living your own life? That's exactly the way I feel and believe now. We're here just once, and to complicate this short life with the details of day-to-day living, to clutter it up with a lot of outside responsibilities, why, it's a crime against life itself. I've got to have so much time to myself — to think in. I want to ramble around when the mood strikes me — to see other kinds of people — to do other things — to live my life at times in other ways. I can't give that up. I simply cannot, Chlo. I must travel alone, to take what I get — good or bad — on my own. Life has *got* to have some meaning to me; and I've got to walk alone to dig it out. This sharing of one's life with another all the time — this shifting of responsibilities — I can't see it. And as bad as it sounds, I repeat that I can't under any conditions step out of the road I'm following. If I want to pick up to-morrow and go to France or India I can do it. It's my choice. It's not in me to sit back and be a husband. I'd make the rottenest husband in the world. You know that. And children? You don't want children now, Chlo, but sooner or later — there's never been a married

woman yet who sooner or later didn't cry for children. Hereafter means nothing to me; it's a dream for the people who can't get what they want out of this life. And I've no desire, not one ounce of desire, to have my name perpetuated through any offspring of mine. If I can't get what I want now — all right, I lose it and that's the end.

— I'm telling you all this, Chlo, because I do love you so much. I mean every word of it; it's straight from my heart; and I believe it's a better and truer love than most men have to offer. Because beauty is the only thing that has any real meaning to me; it's the only thing worth while in all we see and do. And it's the beauty of life I want to share with you. The rest — well, what does the rest count for after all?

He was on his knees now beside my chair again. His arms were stretched across my lap, his hands clasping mine in his. And he was speaking brokenly and in a trembly voice that was tense. But what was he saying? I only caught snatches. Memories. I was overwhelmed with memories. His plea held long ago familiar arguments. They weighed down on me. Arguments that had come back to me over and over again and insisted on being reargued until I was sick of the sight of them. What had Gordon

said? *I don't believe in marriage. For myself I mean. I don't want children . . . settling down in an apartment or home . . . raising children . . . all doing the same thing . . . forgetting how to think. . . . To me it's taking the meaning out of life . . . it would make my painting a secondary affair. . . . I can't give up my freedom. It means too much . . . to see other kinds of people . . . to do other things . . . I've got to walk alone to dig it out . . .* every few words he struck me a blow in the face. Did he know? Was he saying these things deliberately? Why did he do it? Was it intentional? On his knees before me I vaguely knew he was making love to me but I no longer heard. Oh, God, oh, God!

How it hurt. Oh! Oh! God, dear God, how it hurts. Even now it hurts. Years before I had believed those arguments. He believed them now. That was the only difference: He believed them now more truly and earnestly than ever I did. All his sophisticated experience was behind them. He believed every word he was saying. Oh!

Chlo rolled the weight of her body from her right arm and sank back so suddenly that the quick jar drew forth a squeak from the lightly built bed frame. Rot, she whispered, pressing her teeth tightly together. She turned on one side, then the other. Finally, she half rolled, half threw, herself flat on her stomach, at an angle across the bed. Her face was buried in the pillow and she raised her arms above her head until they were, from elbow down, hanging loosely over the side. She turned her face the better to breathe, and sighed.

I won't think of such things. I won't. Now is the time for all good men—mad dogs and Englishmen. I wish it were morning. I'm jumpy. I wish—I don't wish anything. Sleep now. Go to sleep. One—two—three—four—ten years of freedom. After all you can't be free from yourself whatever happens. I can't I know. But that's the only freedom most people ever really want, whatever the freedom they scream and cry for. Authors write to get rid of thoughts that worry them. For what other reason should Swift or Voltaire or Schopenhauer or—or Ibsen have turned out such books? They were only trying to find a way to be rid of themselves. They were running away from themselves just as much as J. P. when he buys a radio. What did I say to Gordon that time? I want freedom in which to learn and grow and become something; I want to get away from home and this stupid drab life. Oh, dear! And Gordon was so young and so shocked. I felt so old, so sure, the age and sureness that only a very young mind can feel. Marry? The word filled me with scorn and bitterness. What chance had a married woman? Marriage and a home and three meals a day, raising children, watching them grow up, then their marriage, then *their* children. Round and round and round. What a horrible tread mill

we have made of civilized existence. Did mother in all her life do a single solitary thing that was not approved by a thousand years old convention? *My mother said. . . . My mother did. . . . When I was your age. . . . I must speak with your father first dear.* But was she worse than other mothers? Was she a worse mother than Mrs. Simmons or Aunt Georgia or Mrs. Larkness? They were all like that. If any one were to have told mother she was not a perfect mother she would have been shocked — horribly shocked; and she could never have believed it. I don't blame her. But I can never forgive her the lies, the hundreds of silent lies that hid so many truths from me. They left unanswered questions reeling through my brain and torturing it for years. Yet how much of the fault was mine? I was ashamed and afraid to ask some one else, I was ashamed of my own thoughts and dreams. I was fool enough to believe that such ideas only entered the heads of vile and unmentionable people. I can't forgive that. Never. I don't believe I'll ever be able to reconcile what I know and think with what I feel.

Everything was evil. When I was too young to know what evil was. Even when Gordon and I sailed cakes of soap in the bathtub. Her indignant head poked through the bathroom door.

Naked! The scorn, the horror, the anger she piled up in that word. — Playing naked with a boy! Gordon take your clothes into the next room and dress. I'll speak to your mother, young man. Chloretta — don't stand there in that idiotic way. Put on your dress and go straight to your room. I'll see to you in one minute. My child playing naked with a boy! — And I was five years old. How odd it is. Even now when I say, naked, to myself, I hesitate. To think that after more than twenty years I still squirm at the word naked. Naked. That afternoon will never, never fade. Whipped and packed to bed without supper. No explanation; not one spark of sympathy. It was cold-blooded. That's exactly what it was: thoughtless and cold-blooded. I know, because I know what mother's feelings must have been; it was impersonal, a shocked feeling that was not her own but the public property that was shared with thousands of other mothers who had inherited it from their mothers without knowing how or why. Without questioning. She gave no explanation to me. She gave no reason why I should not play in the tub — naked — with Gordon. Only shocked stern words, a whipping, and bed without supper. And I lay in bed troubled. A question of a difference. Boys were boys; and girls were girls. I knew that before. But I had

never questioned it before. Of course not. I knew there was a difference, but it meant nothing to me. I could see Gordon was not the same as I. But what of it? It meant nothing. Now it was a question. Something not to be mentioned. Something fearful. What? I lay in bed and questioned. There was no answer. Only a something. And I could hear mother's shocked voice repeating my crime to father. A word here and there. And then father's heavy laugh, sobered at once by mother's quick remonstrance. And I cried to myself. I'm sure I must have cried myself to sleep. How can such stupid cruelty exist? Was mother blind? And it comes back to me now. Twenty years and I can still recall the feeling I had then — can still know what that shame and fear were like — can still writhe at the memory. And yet — and yet — mother loved me. *I have only your best interests at heart, dear.* . . . How many times has that sentence stirred me to silent, rebellious protest? And she meant every word, poor dear; every word came straight from her heart. Straight-laced and stiff-backed. I can see her now with the half perplexed and half worried look in her eyes. Life was dreadfully serious and there was only one answer to any problem: the answer willed by the multitude of mothers who had lived and died the generation before. She was

sincere. But what a curious quality of paradox her scrupulous sincerity held. Every emotion ticketed and in the right slot always ready to slip forth on the proper occasion and at no other time. How can any one be that way? When father died I wanted to cry. I couldn't. The more I felt I should cry the farther away I was from tears. Oh dear, how worried I was sneaking into my bedroom. I said to myself, Father is dead. Dead. Do you understand what I say; can you realize that? Dead. Gone forever. And what do you feel? You loved him, didn't you? All right. Why don't you have some feeling about it? Look at mother — she loved him and she shows it. How can you be so brutal? have you no feeling? I argued with myself, and the same unemotional calm stayed with me until I was ashamed at my own lack of feeling. And the tears flowed from mother's eyes. Her heart seemed broken and she acted — and was — as a human being is supposed to be under such circumstances. I watched her in amazement. I could never understand; never have I been able to understand how people can react as they should when they can be conscious of the fact that they should. It's as if you were on the stage and the world waiting to see how you played your part. There was I wondering how I should act and feel; there was mother

acting and feeling as all the world demanded. Every bit of her emotion was as natural and sincere as — as — a daybreak or a floating cloud. I am different, I said to myself, I am not like other people; things go deeper with me. How many, many times I've made that excuse! Giving a reason for what I know is a lie. But what was the difference? What was it? At the funeral it was the same dreadful way. Mother wept softly while the preacher talked and Aunt Georgia and Aunt Kate sat on either side and patted her hands. I could only sit still with my head bent. Wondering. Wondering how in the world mother could be so wonderfully and accurately natural. Wondering if Dr. Gardner meant what his soft, cultivated baritone was saying, or if his words and the rise and fall of his tones were simply rote; wondering why Mrs. Larkness should be crying too; wondering why I didn't feel like crying and if I really would scream out loud the next minute. Then Emma Lou reached out and took my hand. How terribly, horribly embarrassing that was — what self-conscious agony. And when they sang. Oh! Aunt Kate with her high-pitched piercing voice drowning the low hum of the others. A wild, insane desire nudged me to laugh. It's a wonder I didn't. Laughs and funerals. Did no one else see how funny it was? I glanced around

quickly. Every one with head bowed, singing softly, men and women dabbing at their eyes with handkerchiefs. What did father's death mean to them? Of course, it was the atmosphere. And mother steadily sobbing. I was a spectator apart gazing at a problem play I couldn't understand. Does training do that or what, I wonder? Three days passed before I cried and then I cried all night long. I never have known why I cried. Yet the same day of the funeral, right after we returned from the cemetery, mother and Aunt Kate and Uncle Ben and Aunt Georgia talked over financial matters. They sat in the parlor and spoke with grave and professionally sympathetic voices. Their actions seemed so strange. If they hadn't been crying so hard an hour before—but am I different? That sort of thing is nonsense, Cordie says. She says no one is different from any one else except in degree. She would have called my feelings neurotic. All right. I don't care. Perhaps I am neurotic. At least I'm not automatic and I don't pour out emotion like a machine. But if neurosis is a matter of health then maybe I'm mechanical as much as mother. No, that couldn't be so. She took everything for granted. I try to think things out, anyway. I am different from lots of people I know in many ways.

Oh mother, mother, I loved you. You know I did. But why didn't you try to understand me a little? You continually accused me of being selfish and stony. Who made me that way? You were only thinking of other people and of what they would think. And you, too, father. You were a cold-blooded, narrow-minded man. God-fearing. A God-fearing man. That is what I've heard your old friends tell me you were. A God-fearing man! And the fear of God put the fear of everything else into you and you tried to instill that same fear into everybody around you. I know now. I couldn't see it as a child, but I know now. Poor father. I don't really hate him. I pity him. Respectability and religion were at the very core of his being. Only a real fear of God could have made religion such a nightmare of belief. There was nothing beautiful about it. God was a monster who tortured you and destroyed you and sent you to hell to be punished for millions of years if you didn't learn his creed and catechism and if you didn't go to Sunday school and church every Sunday. I couldn't understand how any person could be so mean. I asked why God did that and father said it was Divine Justice; and when I asked what was Divine Justice he was irritated and said, little children should not ask questions about such subjects;

they can't understand. You must take what your elders teach without question. But questions came into my mind and stuck there unanswered and gave birth to more questions. They grew and made me unhappy. You had to do things because God demanded it and you shouldn't do other things because God would be angry. What was he like, this God? Why did he insist on such queer things? How could he be everywhere? Where was he during the week when no one mentioned him? The questions that tortured my brain! The big revival of Dr. Paulsen. Oh! We sat on a front seat. A beautiful voice and long wavy gray hair, and such a lovely face: the sweet, gentle face of a saint. Could his God be the same father talked of and was so much afraid of? This God of Dr. Paulsen's seemed a different sort of being. I wanted to ask father if they were the same but was afraid. I looked up at father and the expression of his face was new. I was startled and looked around at mother. Something had happened. I had never seen them like this. Their faces were — what? Softened, flowing, beatific. Yes, beatific. They were no longer my parents: a man and woman who were strangers. I was afraid and looked around at the sea of faces pale under the yellow lights of the big auditorium. Something had happened to

these people. What? I couldn't understand and felt alone, far away from them, and their faces danced and melted into each other before my eyes. I stared again at Dr. Paulsen. What was he doing now? His arms were outstretched and his voice was pleading, his words came slowly. Behind him the organist was playing a hymn that was a long-drawn wail in soft baritone and bass chords. *Confess unto Jesus . . . confess unto Jesus. . . . Confess. . . .* I caught that much. What did it mean? People were walking up to the front, passing under Dr. Paulsen's outstretched arms, and stumbling back to their seats, crying. Almost all were crying. What was happening to these people? Dr. Paulsen's face was lovely, aglow. It shone. The expressions on familiar faces were new—all new. What was happening? I was facing some deep mysterious secret known to all but me alone. There went Emma Lou and Stella and then Austin and his mother and Gordon with his aunt. What did they mean? Why did they cry? Suddenly I was drawn to my feet. Mother's hand held mine tightly and she pulled me after her. We stood under the outstretched arms of Dr. Paulsen.

—*Blessing of God and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, be with you forever and forever. . . .*

We were back standing. Mother and father

singing with tears running unchecked down their cheeks, and that new strange and happy look in their faces.

That night father kissed me good night and said, God bless my darling child, and mother came in and tucked me in and put her arms around me and held me tightly for a long time. I lay awake. Happy. It was one of the happiest nights of my life. Something had happened; I didn't know what it was; but now everything and everybody would be different. Mother and father would not be cross and stern with me. This must be a new God who had driven the old one out. He blessed and made you happy instead of punishing you for doing what you liked to do and what mother and father called sins. A new world surrounded me as I lay there in bed and I went to sleep still wondering what had happened to Emma Lou and Gordon and Stella and Austin. For they had been crying, too, as they sang. Tomorrow they would be different from the friends I had hitherto known them as being.

To-morrow and a shattered dream. Awake with the same expectancy that Christmas morning brings, I remembered and almost danced for joy. But in my enthusiasm I was slow in dressing and mother came in and scolded me. The shock of amazement left me dumb and she scolded me for

looking stupid. A mirage had floated within my vision and had disappeared again. Nothing had really changed. It left me miserable. All day at school I furtively studied Emma Lou and Stella. They were the same as last week; they talked in the same way, laughed in the same way, did the same things they had always done. Only Gordon was quiet and kept apart to himself for several days. At recess he sat alone with serious face. But a few days passed and he was the Gordon before the revival. I can see now. He is like that: a dramatist of emotions; they are almost impersonal to him. He is the actor and stage director and audience all in one. That's a good description. I never thought of that before, a dramatist of his own emotions. He is always watching his emotions and acting up to them. That explains why the thrill of the revival stayed with him longer. But me. What about me? Why did the thrill not strike me? What a morbid little creature I must have been, left cold and unmoved by all that had stirred father and mother and all my friends, yet miserably depressed because their thrill was a passing moment. And it depresses to think of it now. I don't feel superior to them. I don't. I don't. But such religion seems so dishonest. I got a peep at something I vaguely felt was beautiful. And it disap-

peared before my eyes. I only felt; I could not have known — that was all. But the memory is still there. And I was only twelve or thirteen, going on thirteen. Because that was the same year when father said I must go in the big girls' class at Sunday school. How I hated that stupid class. Miss Annie and her wart with the long hairs curling right under her left eye, with her drippy sweet voice and her smug manner when she talked of Jesus and God. A horrid, dull meeting of overgrown girls with long faces giving mechanical answers to mechanical questions. I wanted beauty. I didn't know what I wanted then. But I know now, it was beauty. And there was no beauty. The well was dry. They let down the bucket and brought up dust. Beauty. Beauty. Religion can be beautiful; it has been beautiful. Martyrs and cathedrals, they were born of virgin beauty. Religion must be beautiful or it's no longer religion; it's a name without meaning. Religion? What do I know of religion? That was not religion I was thrust into, it was a fear. All my life I've been taught to fear something. I'm sick of it. I'm afraid to do this, afraid to do that, when every ounce of intelligence I have tells me to go ahead. I suppose I'll have to fight that idiotic battle as long as I live. Oh dear! And mother called me stubborn! Because

I wanted to know the why of things. If she could have known how lonesome I've been all my life. Lonesome. Mother, mother, if you could have known how lonesome I was; if you could only have understood what a horrible mystery you made of life for me. And when I think — the distress and miserable torture that haunted me when. . . . Your callous reticence at such a time. The anguish I suffered, and the knowledge that I had to suffer this through the years to come. To know that all women went through — that nothing could prevent nor help. It was a secret, an unclean secret which even women dared not discuss. And it came as an unexpected slap in the face.

And with it came vague restless longings, feverish restlessness, a longing to be alone, a longing to be with some one. I wanted to weep. Only dreams consoled me. Not much. They came and in an instant they were gone. I read. Morning, noon and night I read romances. And great ambitions coursed through my veins and I lived in a future far, far away from home and all that surrounded me. Men came into my life, a species of man yet unborn, beautiful, strong men who whispered words of charm and did mighty deeds for my sake. And little shivers of ecstasy came and went. The first buds of sex unknown and

unrecognized, that's what I was undergoing. Sex, ugh — I'm sick of that word; that's all you can hear now: sex this and sex that. But it *was* sex nevertheless. It seized me and I didn't know what it was. I longed for what was unknown. *Stop mooning over those silly books. I declare I think I'll have to stop your reading altogether if this keeps on, filling your head with such trash.* The books didn't cause the mooning, mother, the mooning — but the sickening reaction. To come back to the dull drab prose of every day. Every day I studied myself in the mirror. The expression with deep hidden meanings that would some day fill the world with admiration and awe. For the world could not yet understand. And then the flood of tears. Admiration and awe? An unclean creature who must be all her life unclean? Scoldings. I slam my door and throw myself across my bed and lie there. Misunderstood. No one understands me. I lie there biting the pillow. Stiff and tense. I get up and am careful not to look into the mirror as I undress. My body frightens me. I am ashamed to see it. And I bathe gingerly and self-consciously, fighting to keep my mind off my body. Tiptoe, tiptoe — downstairs and through the front door. *Where are you going, Chloretta?* Oh dear, can I never be alone for a minute — must I always be telling where I am

going? *Up-town mother*. Indignant and raging for blocks. People pass and self-consciousness drives mother from my head; I look straight ahead; every one I pass, I am sure is staring at me steadily. Especially boys. Why boys? I don't know. But uncomfortably I feel they must be staring at me. Does an acquaintance bob up in the distance? Half a block away I begin to worry about speaking. I speak. For another half-block my arms swing stiffly, so it seems, until I reach the library. Thinking of what others will think. Saying to myself that they don't count, yet worrying over their attitudes. Wanting to stand out from crowds and all the while hiding myself in them. What could Gordon have seen in me then? Afraid of boys, shy with girls, dreaming romances and writing away in the secret of my bedroom. He was nicer than the other boys I knew, gentler and — and nicer. He showed me his pictures. He told me his ambitions. That was a bond. He hated things too; he dreamed of being a great artist as I dreamed of being a great writer. He told me his dreams. I wanted him then but I didn't know it. I couldn't know. I didn't know anything. I wanted to get away. Just as I do now. To get away. Run away. I know I can't run away. But if I could only start over. Anew. A village in France.

ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR

Or Italy. To see and live with new faces, new people, new languages, new customs. I'm sick of this meaningless kind of life I'm leading, all of it. I'm sick of it. Sick — sick — sick of it!

Chlo suddenly sat up stiffly and for a few seconds glared at the dull haze where the open window cut through the darkness of the room. Drawing up her knees she rested her head on them and closed her eyes. Wearily she rubbed her hand across her forehead to remove the irritating, clinging strands of damp hair. Then in a sudden fury she turned, viciously smoothed her pillow, and lay back.

Oh, damn. Two damns. And damnation. There I go again. I who give Willa such lectures when she's in the dumps.—A woman is

in the same boat as a man — she gets out of life what she puts into it; she gets just about what she deserves in the long run. — Are those really my words? That's irony. They have the suspicious ring of one of J. P.'s platitudes. Could he have spoken them to me first? But I certainly remember lecturing Willa at lunch at Schrafft's one day. What in the world was I feeling so cocky about? What — oh, I know. That marvelous plot I had worked out for a short story. Buried away and never written. Starting and stopping — never finishing: that's the way I do in everything. Well, I don't care. What's the use? Cordie says every idea we think is new was probably ridden to death by some old Greek centuries before the time of Christ. She must be right. All we ever take the trouble to think much about now are sex and money and they must have always been the chief worries. Motor cars and revues and cabarets and radio and biology and psychoanalysis and — oh dear, I'm lonesome! Why isn't there some way to turn yourself wrong side out? I can't remember when I wasn't lonesome! At home, at school — that dreadful party, that dreadful, dreadful party when the girls were passing through home to school! The bustling to and fro, slicing sandwiches, icing cakes, dragging out the best linen, giving Ida carefully de-

tailed instructions. — Now be sure you know where everything is, and make haste for it's only three-quarters of an hour between trains. And for heaven's sake don't spill anything when you're passing. And by the way, I want you to serve the tall, dark-haired girl first; that's Janet Thalmar — she's a junior and the others are only sophomores like me. So be sure. Now remember — the tea first and with a napkin at the same time, *then* sandwiches, *then* the cake. — I was bubbling with excitement but when I started to speak to mother I was afraid my excitement and enthusiasm would merely sound silly and stupid to her. I watched the clock. Three. The train had pulled in. They would be here any minute. My heart pat-patting against my ribs in excitement. Good old Janet, I said to myself, she *is* a spiff; she'll be a big writer some day. A warm feeling for them all gushed up in me. Marie and Rosina and Margaret — they were all spiffs. It was nice to have them in my home, to entertain.

— Chlo, what time does that train get in? Oughtn't those girls be here by now? —

My heart jumps in a panic. I glance quickly at the clock, then catch myself.

— Maybe the train is a little late. They'll be here in a few minutes now, mother. —

But I am uneasy. Six minutes past three — it's

only four minutes' walk from the station. Oh, they will be here in a few minutes. Of course they will. Casually I walk over to the window as if to straighten the curtain, and look up the street. There is old Mr. Gardner. I keep my eyes on the point where the street is hidden by a protruding house. The street is empty. Can the train be late?

— Chlo, you'd better find out about that train. Everything is getting cold, and it's almost fifteen minutes past now. Go ahead and call up the station, do you hear? —

— All right, mother, all right! The trains are never very late though: they're sure to be here in a few minutes. —

My heart is thumping; somewhere inside it is slowly dropping. A sudden thought seizes me and shakes me. Despair is settling over me and I can almost feel myself paling. Suppose they have forgotten to come — or just don't care to. — Hello, is that information? Can you — can you tell me if number one-three-three has come in yet? One-three-three. . . . Oh! on time. Thank you. — I place the receiver back carefully and walk back into the room where everything is so nicely arranged for my party. I walk over to the table and pick up a magazine.

— Well! —

I try to answer carelessly. I simply can't let mother know how hurt and ashamed I am. It's too terrible. I dare not look up.

—Train's in, she said. I suppose they'll be here in a few minutes.—

—Well, I hope so. They won't have much time if they don't hurry up. I must say you take it mighty calmly. Looks to me as if they weren't coming at all. Did she say if the train was on time?—

—I don't care if they don't come. What difference does it make.—

—Hush, Chloretta, don't talk to your mother like that; it isn't respectful. I've never seen any one so callous. I'd be worried to death if *my* friends didn't care any more for me than that.—

I thumb through the magazine without seeing what it is. They aren't coming. A lump presses against my throat and my eyes sting. They don't care. I'm nothing. Nobody. Sickening emptiness that is a heavy weight inside. Minutes pass that are hours. Hoping when hope has fled.

—Chlo, I'm afraid something's happened and those girls aren't coming. It's half-past now.—

—I—I guess they're not. Well—I think I'll run upstairs a minute.—

I walk slowly from the room, trying to appear as if I am utterly indifferent. I try to hum. But

tears are welling up beyond my control. Once outside the room I rush upstairs. Oh! Oh! Oh! Sobs catch me before I can reach my room. I slam my door and throw myself across the bed and lie there, sobbing, sobbing. How awful that was! I hated people, the world, everything in life. Some day when I was a great writer! People would point me out as I drove past in my luxurious limousine. Janet and Marie and Margaret would get all their old schoolmates together and arrange a grand reception for me. I would accept. Then at the last minute I would send a note telling them that I was so sorry but balls were *such* a bore and I simply couldn't give up my precious time and energy to these silly affairs. Oh, I would get even. What a lonesome little goop I was, and how I made myself suffer. Too sensitive, eh Cordie? That's what you'd say, I know.

But it's frightful to feel lonesome and to keep on feeling lonesome; to dream and have no one to share your dreams. That must have started my hatred of school. I liked it the first year; I think I was impressed and awed, but the second year I hated school as much as I hated home. I certainly did make an unhappy little ass of myself. It took me years to make myself believe that Janet and Marie and Margaret and Rosina weren't laughing at me after my party. And Rosina never

did apologize. Oh dear! I thought the whole school knew and was laughing at me behind my back. When I saw two girls whispering together — when I heard a girl laugh — my heart would jump. I was sure that I was the butt of every smile. Self-conscious. It's born in me, I suppose, and I'll never overcome it. At times I've had to argue with myself to persuade myself that Cordie and Willa weren't talking about me when they were speaking in low tones. How can I be that way when I've always worked so hard to overcome it? I say to myself, you don't care. You aren't interested one way or the other in what they say about you. What difference does it make? Or I say, they aren't talking about you. Girls think about themselves, just as I'm thinking about myself, and not about you. What can I do? I always admit the truth of my arguments but it doesn't do any good. And yet I don't really care after all what people do say. The minute they are gone from my life I forget them. Only at school I felt like an outsider. But no wonder I was an outsider when I kept to myself so much, never budging from my room in the evening. Jean laughed at me. But I didn't dare tell her. How was I to know but what Jean — no, I was unfair to Jean about that. In the same room with her every night I should have

known better. But I couldn't tell her. Gracious, wasn't I frightened? Who on earth could it have been I wonder? Well, I'll never know now anyway. But oh what a disgusting — hey ho, hey ho, let's forget — the moon has a shadow among — Gordon has beautiful hands — his skin is smooth and — fol-de-lol hey-ho-fol-de — if we two children had married when mother died where would we have been? — Papa. Mamma. What dress must I wear to-day, Mamma? Stop that crying. We'll have onion soup for dinner, Mary, you know that Mr. Blake likes onion soup. — Married at nineteen, mother at twenty, in the rut for life. Thank heaven we didn't marry then. But I'm not so sure. Could things have been worse than they are now? Beautiful, slender hands, long and graceful. Smooth, clean skin to receive a woman's caresses. You were different, Gordon. Funny. Tenseness died out when I was with you. You were sensitive and you were quick to fit into the moods of others. You said, I think I understand you, Chlo. You are not like the other girls I know; you are different — these others don't see as you and I do; they don't see the big things in life. I think you will write some wonderful books. Oh, we were serious. The world about us was a mass of wooden puppets without minds or souls; parents and daily chores were merely in-

conveniences from which time would relieve us on our upward climb above the dull, drab prose of everyday life. And my poems. You were so sweet about them, Gordon, and they must have been fearfully rotten and immature.— Great stuff, you said, great stuff, Chlo, there's genius in that line, pure genius, you said, your forehead wrinkling with weighty criticism. That really is beautiful; repeat that line over again. And I always would. What *was* that line? Let's see now: *My soul steals away*—I've forgotten. Oh, yes—*And my soul soars afar in the night*. Oh, dear. So young and so deadly in earnest. How the breath-taking thought of my own hidden genius drove shivers up and down my spine. But that was happiness. Childish and illusory though it may have been, happiness dwelt in the heart of those shining hours we spent in explaining how we understood each other and how the shallow world could never plumb our depths.

Happiness? When I was free. Free. Ah! There was happiness. I'd like to feel that way again. Free with the world before me. Free to leave that humdrum town for New York. New York. Magic word! New York—where fame and glory and appreciation waited. I don't believe mother's death struck the note of sadness in me that it should have. I was sorry. But the

thought of freedom blocked the path of sorrow. Even at the service the thought kept bobbing up; even when twinges of remorse showed me how horribly wrong I was being the thought would pop back again. I fought it. I loved you mother. What more could I do? For a dream planted years before, watered and nurtured from day to day, had burst forth into a glorious full-blown flower. Freedom! And but for that—what? Coming a year later, I believe, it would have been too late—I would have married Gordon by then, I think. Yes, I'm sure. I'm very—I wish to God it *had* come later. If I could only have known then what I—I wish—oh, Lord, I wish I had married him then. Little egotistical fool that I was! With my great ideas of myself and my genius. We would have been happy, for we wouldn't have known any better. That's like me to say that—wouldn't have known any better. As if I know better now. Know what better? Know—know that life is the same rut no matter where you slip in or when.

But it *is* sweet to look back upon his proposal. He was born an artist to the tips of his long, graceful fingers. So gently and beautifully he talked. I wonder how much was artist even then that spoke, how much was heart. Now I'm getting sentimental. It was neither love nor art

really, it was moonlight and sensitive twenty. Spring. The fresh smell of late evening and the creak, creak of the chains as we monotonously swung back and forth in that lovely, ugly old wooden swing. The rare contentment that pervaded me, intoxicated me, the contentment of satisfied longings, of possessing my future as my own property to trade with as I pleased. Desultory talk. Disjointed talk. I was dreaming dreams and in the happiness they painted I was alone, unsharing. Creak, creak. What a lovely old swing. What a restful, soothing creak it had. Gordon reached out and closed his hand over mine.

— And now, Chlo, are you really going to New York and live there and work all by yourself? —

His question intensified the exultant mood that held me. I was gazing at him from the heights of an unconsciously assumed wisdom. I felt older, superior, thrilled to a secret pride in the feeling. I'm sure I must have exhaled a smug superiority when I spoke. A genius who was at last going forth to bring the world to bent knees at her feet. My superiority was a stone dropped into the still waters of my contentment, sending out shallow ripples of sympathy. He is so young, poor boy, was the thought the ripples carried and spread, so young. I have never realized before how much older I am than he; we are worlds

apart after all. It is so hopeless to try to make him understand the subtle meanings life holds for me. I gazed down at him patronizingly from the heights of my wisdom.

— Yes, Gordon. I'm going to New York all by myself, to live all by myself. It's a beautiful dream come true. I'm going where I can live and see life. Just think of it, Gordon; isn't it terribly exciting? In New York to do as I please and go where I please. To be through with Acton for good and all. Art and literature and music and the theatre — oh! All the things in life that really mean something. Those are the things in life I must have. And now I'm going to have them. I'm going to make them my daily bread and meat. Where I can know real writers and thinkers, the worth while minds of the world. Where I can think and work and carve out my destiny. Of course, I'm going, Gordon. After the way we've talked of New York? Of course, silly. Oh! Won't it be perfectly marvelous? Don't you think it's wonderful?

Was there ever a more smug little snob than I? Carve out my destiny! A brilliant lot of carving I've done. But at that, I don't suppose I was worse than other girls of my age. Just a different slant I took. How about Jane with all her talk of romance and her bunch of frat pins? — I can't

help it if I am popular. Bob actually threatened suicide if I wouldn't become engaged to him, and Red was just as bad. I try to keep them off, but honest, I can't. Some girls are just born to be pursued by men. It isn't our fault. . . . — Of all drivels — little hypocrite, always reading sticky romances and quoting poetry. Oh, rot! What right have I to talk? Well — at least I didn't quote Mrs. Browning and run after every boy who came along. Better if I had, perhaps. Good Lord, why should I get indignant after all these years? Pretty bad. I was thinking of — oh, yes, Gordon was silent for a long time after I had spoken. Back and forth in the swing. Creak, creak. He kept clearing his throat until I noticed and his hand was becoming warm and uncomfortably moist in mine. His voice was throaty and trembled slightly.

— Ye-es, it's wonderful. But why don't you wait a little while. I mean — well, you know, Chlo, to think it out, that is, to plan out your future — you know what I mean — this is a big thing you're doing, one of the biggest steps any one ever took. I mean — that is — you know, Chlo. —

What is he driving after? Is he going to act as all the rest of them are doing? He's talking just like Aunt Kate and Aunt Georgia. I wish people would let me alone: I know what I'm do-

ing without every one in town offering advice. —

— What are you talking about, Gordon? I've told you a thousand times I'm going. What should I stay here to plan about? We've talked it over enough and you've helped me plan enough, goodness knows, without bringing it up now. I know how to take care of myself. Don't be silly. —

— I'm not being silly, Chlo. And I'm not trying to talk you out of New York. I don't want to stay here and rot any more than you do, and I'm not either. But — but — this *is* a serious step you're taking, you know, and I just — I just — I mean why don't you wait a little while. You've got plenty of time and —

— But, Gordon, I'm nineteen now. Why, I'm grown up. I can't wait longer or I'll be an old woman before I ever get started doing anything. You can't wait to begin writing, you know: 'art is long and time is fleeting.' Why, Gordon, I never thought *you'd* —

— No, please, Chlo, I'm not — not — trying to — you know what I mean. Of course, I think you're too big for Acton — and New York is where you belong — but all *I'm* saying is that you might wait a while. I'm going to New York too. You know that. I don't fit this place any more than you do. We're both different, Chlo.

But I was only thinking — well — eventually I'm going to New York too, you see, and I just thought — you know — you see —

— But I don't see at all. What difference does that make? I'll be in New York when you get there. Perhaps I'll know enough artists by the time you come to help you out a lot. Oh! I'm glad I thought of that. I'll tell them all about you. —

— That's not what I was talking about, Chlo. You see, the point is this — well — you see — why can't you wait a little and we can both go together and make our future there together. I'm going too when I come into my money — and why can't we marry — and — and —

— Why, Gordon —

— Yes, I know, Chlo. I don't mean to marry and live the silly way most people do. You know I'm different from those kind of people. But we're both artists and we have such a deep understanding. And — we can be such a wonderful help to each other and do things together and see things together. I can paint and you can write. And I'll illustrate all your books and stories. We can become famous together. Think how wonderful that would be. And you know no other artist could understand your work as well as I could. Think of the wonderful future we would

have together. Won't you do that, Chlo? Won't you? —

He is hurting my hand. If he had only kissed me, or taken me in his arms or done something. But he talks, he only talks. And suddenly I feel so weak and uncertain and restless. Oh, dear! He is squeezing my hand and leaning over me. — Won't you, Chlo, he repeats again. His hand is moist and his breath warm against my cheek. Emotions tumble over each other and wear down my strength until I am left listless and passive. I wonder would I have given in had he kissed me? I don't know. But he leans back and releases my hand. And I am angry. Suddenly I am furiously angry. Without knowing why, I hate him. But I know now why it was. I'm sure it was because he didn't kiss me; because instead of crushing me in his arms he left me sitting there in that listless, expectant frame of mind. Else, why should I have recalled it all so often and so long afterward and pictured so many different delicious things he might have done? But that was funny. I thought I was angry because he was interfering with my plans and making me feel uncomfortable and selfish. But I really wanted him, without knowing it, and he only talked, and I really wanted him, and was ready to receive his kisses and have his smooth

skin close against mine. What utter idiots we are. But as I answer him my self-control returns and with it the new superiority that for a moment has fled. Yet at the same time I am ready to cry.

—No, I won't. I shall never marry. Never. And — and — I don't see why you talk this way. I'm not made like most women — to be tied down as a slave in the home. I'm made for bigger things in life. I'm going to write, and marriage shall never get in my way. You know I don't believe in marriage; for myself, I mean. It's taking all the meaning out of life; it would mean making my writing a secondary affair. I can't give up my freedom, and I won't. It means too much. I want to see other people and do other things. I've got to go my own way alone. So there. —

—Ah, Chlo, I don't mean for you to give up writing or be the kind of married couple you're thinking about. I want to be — to be partners, to strike out and conquer life together, to win fame together — I don't want you to give up anything. But it's awfully lonesome to go at everything alone. Of course — if you don't like me enough, that's different. But I thought — you know I — I've always been — and felt — that we understood each other — you do love me, Chlo? Don't you, Chlo? You do love me, don't you?

Say you do. But if you don't care, of course —

— That's not fair, Gordon, and you know it isn't fair. How much I like you has nothing to do with my going to New York. If I were willing to marry at all I'd rather marry you than any man I know. I think you're as sweet as you can be, but I am wiping out all my past and consecrating my life to — to literature. It's almost a sacred trust. —

— That's what I mean, Chlo. It *is* a sacred trust. And I want to help you guard it and keep it untouched and sacred. If you really loved me you couldn't be so cold-blooded about it. I tell you I feel the same about marriage as you do and I hate this cut and dried business of settling down and doing nothing else but run a home as much as you do. I want you to be as big a success as a writer as I as a painter. We can be such a help to each other. Chlo, please don't run off this way. Why won't you wait and marry me? Please, Chlo, we can be so wonderfully happy doing everything together, Chlo. —

— I'm terribly sorry, Gordon. But there's something in me bigger than myself calling me away. If I could only say what won't go into words. Perhaps I do love you. I'm not sure that I know what love is. I like you lots better than I do any boy I know. But I *can't* marry

you. I hate marriage. I—I don't want children, and every one who is married has children. It makes me shudder to think of settling down in an apartment or house raising children, doing the same thing each day, forgetting how to think. I don't know—but—but it seems to me married women miss everything. Look at all the married women here, and how much do they get from life? I don't want to spend all my time gossiping and saying silly things and being respectable and keeping up appearances and looking after meals and things. I want to get away from seeing it just as quick as I can. I want to be alone and write alone. I'm afraid you'll never understand me, Gordon.—

—I know so what you mean, Chlo. Of course I understand you. And I'm the same. You know we'd be different.—

—You say that now, Gordon. But would it be that way? I've heard mother and father speak of the time they were engaged, and I could hardly believe my ears, but when they got married they became like all others. I don't believe it lasts when people marry. You get to know each other too well. I'm awfully sorry, Gordon. I do like you awfully and I shall miss you terribly, but I must follow the path of my future.—

Gordon is standing. I can't see his face, but the artist in him is speaking. No emotion can

drown the artist; it rises to the surface and takes command. Our moods are soaring. Romantic gestures are waving aside realities. I am exalted by my own words.

—Good bye, Chlo. We can always be good friends, can't we? Some day you will understand. Some day I'm going to New York too. If there's anything I can ever do, you will let me know, won't you? I shall never forget our talks, they have been the biggest things in my life. Won't you — won't you kiss me good bye, Chlo? —

The beauty of our parting sweeps me through and through. It is a beautiful tragedy, and I vainly seek, in that instant, to recall some stirring romantic scene to compare with it. As I slowly rise, I have a feeling that we are in the midst of an exquisite moment. The same thrill as if I were reading a sad, charming love scene in *Pride and Prejudice*. Gordon must sense our farewell in the same manner. We are actors playing our parts without previous rehearsal. We are actors nevertheless. I bend forward, instinctively with half-closed eyes. I feel his breath, then a soft moist touch partly brushing my lips, partly my left cheek. I open my eyes. He has turned. I watch him, fascinated, as he clumps down the steps and walks swiftly up the sidewalk. He does not glance back. The sense of a great and beautiful renunciation holds me in rapt ecstasy.

Chlo half jumped, half rolled, from her bed. For a moment she stood indecisively on the coarse rug at the side of the bed, until almost automatically her bare feet began to fumble for their worn silk mules. I know what I'll do, she whispered to herself. With outstretched arms and screwed-up eyes, she shuffled noiselessly through the door and closed it slowly behind her. Having switched on the light she hurried into the pantry and returned with a glass of milk. She placed it on the window sill, pulled up the easy chair, walked across the room and switched off the

light, felt her way back, and with a sigh of relief dropped into the chair. She twisted her legs across the front of the chair seat.

This will simply not do at all. What started my brain on this wild goose chase? It's perfect nonsense to let myself go this way. It's just about time, anyway, that I cut out these stupid, sensuous night memories. I've let that habit grow on me steadily ever since—there I go again. I'm grown up; I ought to control my mind better than that. It is thoroughly childish. If I keep on I shall create an—now what did Cordie call that? An inc— oh, I know—an incubus. What a curious name and what an awful perversion. I don't see how Cordie can study and think about such horrid things all the time and be so healthy and normal and boisterous and love loud colors so much. Yet she never lies awake at night and tortures herself with doubts and absurd longings as I do. It must be in my blood. I suppose it's because father and mother wrestled and fought with their morals all their lives. And they've passed it on to me. Oh, dear! It's so maddening to realize that you can't escape your past. I *can* though. Any one can if she will only make the effort. I'll start to-morrow morning. I'll take a sheet of paper and map out a regime of reading

and thinking. But what's the use? I know I won't. How many times have I started regimes to-morrow? And has a single one ever been carried through to the end? No. I'm what I am and I don't suppose I'll ever be anything else. I and my dreams of me! The genius I was going to be — and I can't even pluck up heart and patience to attempt writing any more.

Why didn't I marry Gordon before I left home? Drifting and drifting. Throwing off one illusion to-day to wear another to-morrow. That is funny though — our two proposals. Could anything in the world have been more grotesque? If only the old gods still lived to sit back and laugh, what a glorious chuckle they would have over me. To think that the naïve and unwordly reasons I had for refusing Gordon should be the same wordly and sophisticated ones he throws in my face ten years later. Ten years to switch illusions! This is a sweetly logical life we lead. Or was either of us right? Or both? After all is there anything that is not illusion? Philosophers are nothing but little boys building houses with blocks; one gets his house half built and another kicks it over and starts one of his own and it's kicked over in its turn. Playing with words and ideas and getting nowhere. That's a very good metaphor. I shall have to remember to

pull it on Cordie some time. No I won't. She'd only laugh at me and ask me what trick crowd I've been playing with. I wish I could catch her spirit. If she believes a thing she does it and lets the world go hang. My thoughts are as independent as hers but I never can live up to them. The trouble is, every little breeze that fans me changes the direction of my ideas. Look at the mess I've got myself into. And what shall I do? Do I have to keep up this monotonous sort of living for the rest of my life? I haven't got the nerve to break away; I'm afraid of my friends laughing at me; I'm afraid of what people will say about me; I'm afraid even to look the thing in the face. All I have the courage to do is to lie in bed at night and dream of what could have been and what might be.

How long can I go along this way? I can't keep this up forever. I'll break. I'll become a nervous wreck. Does a single night pass that thoughts don't enter my head and unravel all the resistance the day has built up? Will power? Whoever says there is such a thing as will power lies. He lies, I say. With all his tiresome cleverness, that's one thing Tommie said that was true. — All this stuff you read about will power and self-control is plain old everyday rot. When any one talks to you about these two birds, will

power and self-control, you just say, is that so? Now here's the little joker. You're criss-crossed with a bunch of sensations that assail you every second — every smallest part of a second. One of these sensations asks you to do this; and another asks you to do that; and so on *ad nauseam*. But a lot of them are stronger than others — either in number or individual strength. You know — due to getting more exercise or having been with you longer and all that sort of thing. So a question comes up. And who wins? The old timers, of course. And they gather in camp from three directions: one bunch creeps in at birth; another crowd is bred into you; fear sends the rest. And believe me, you do just about what those old fellows say. Don't you ever pull that bunk about will power and self-control on me again. Now take me —

Dear old Tommie. Or he would have been dear if he had kept his hands and shoes clean and if he hadn't been so ugly and made love to me. Ugh — what terrible lips he had. If he only hadn't tried to make love to me. But that's all any man has in the back of his head. Sooner or later, no matter what they are talking about, they get around to making love. And most men are such awful, hairy, ugly creatures. Either so-called respectable men are such fools and bores,

or all the men worth talking and listening to always spoil everything by trying to make love. Why couldn't Tommie and I have stayed friends without his ruining it by — oh what a beast he was. And how he scared me. The true decadent, he called himself. The most normal product of his age, he said, because he was one of the most sensitive and most useless. — That little *fin de siècle* group of amateurs thought they had created a new spirit when they discovered the ecstasy of decadence. Why, the appearance of decadence on the horizon is the sign of the dawn — and the sunset too — of any ripening civilization. Decadence has ushered in every civilization the world has ever known — and then kicked it out. Egypt and Greece and Rome — each painfully raised her civilization to manhood, and all the time she was really nurturing the twin, decadence, too. And in the end decadence throttled civilization. It always does. What do you think saved China and India so long from disaster? Their gods, of course. For decadence will have no gods. Decadence is built on logic — the logic of the senses. It is the perverted joy of decadence to play with gods as a cat plays with mice before devouring them. Why, we're just beginning to touch the threshold of our civilization. We have only a few real decadents in this country so far: Fitz-

gerald, Faulkner. And they're like Whitman and Blake; they're still ahead of their time. The real decadents won't arrive until another ten years. Poe? Bierce? They were no more decadents than this fellow de Casseres or Sherwood Anderson — they were monomaniacs who happened to be artists. I thought at one time there might be hopes in Mencken. But he's gone the way of many a good man: he fought reform and bunk so hard that he turned professional reformer against reformers. Only in France have they scaled the heights, and France is doomed, she's sliding now. When such animals as Tzara, Breton, Vitrac and their like cut loose, glorious decadence was blossoming in the land.

— And to-day England is coming along nicely, thank you. There's Huxley and his cohorts. No blind groping to that fellow. The perfect example of the evolution of the true decadent. Here's a lad raised in an atmosphere of science and learning seldom equaled. Born along with the broadest and most far reaching doctrine ever developed since Christianity stunted the growth of the world. Evolution was almost his twin. Biology — psychology — evolution — as a child his ears must have been attuned to what was probably the most brilliantly intellectual conversation of that time. And see the outcome; see what

he does with it; see how exquisitely, with what nonchalance he dangles the futility of it all before us. He is the logical outcome of the peak of civilization: the true decadent. The straight course of blind evolution. Baudelaire, Comte de Lisle, even Huysmans—they were children in comparison. They came too early and made the fatal mistake of taking decadence seriously. Not even his most cherished unbeliefs and disillusion should be taken seriously by a civilized man. Only his emotions.

— You see — when you throw off religion, ethics and morals and all that rot automatically follow. And you have only one thing left: art. And art without religion — without gods — turns within itself and becomes simply an attempt to freeze an emotion — any emotion — into some concrete form. When we live for the thrill of emotion — when we see the joke of our serious daily antics — when the reformers gird for battle — you may be sure decadence is marching on us. Civilization is here.

— You say, Chlo, you don't believe in a god. You say you are interested in actions and emotions — the inner lives of the people around you. All right then, look straight down into yourself. Now don't shirk. See what is happening. Put it down. That's all art amounts to. Dig out the

sensation that's living back in the darkest shadows and eating at you. Drag it into the light. That's art. Nothing gives quite the same emotional thrill to a highly sensitized mind as does this intellectual decadence.

—What's the use though? You won't. You have no business trying to write. You're tied up in knots. If I ever so much as mention love you draw into yourself. Oh, I know I'm not the prettiest man in the world; but I know how to make love the most beautiful thing on earth. Come: let me teach you love. Let me show you what an exquisite emotion it can be. Oh, never mind. I might as well be talking to a stone wall. Don't worry. I shan't urge you. But you can't fool me, Chlo. No one's made of ice inside. You have inside you what's inside of every human being above the age of fifteen — and it will come out. You can't keep it back; sooner or later out it pops. Either mentally or physically — or both. Now it would be much better for you to have a chap like me for a lover than some poor idiot who doesn't know the first thing about love and who will get you in the end with some Galahad line of talk if you don't stir beyond your shell a bit. Chlo, you're such a lovely person if you would only throw off this absurd cloak of a nun. Let me teach you love. Let me show you. —

This the end of all his speeches. His theories, his ideas hypnotized and his endings were rude awakenings as if some one had dashed cold water in my face. His red full lips and the coarse hair on the back of his hands and fingers as he gestured. His adam's apple protruding. I rushed from him. In my room I quickly undressed in the dark and crawled hurriedly into bed. Phrases and sentences of his drifted across my mind. What he had said of love. His face stood before me for an instant and I fought it off with the image of Gordon. Gordon. What a contrast. They clashed before me. The sensual face of Tommie and the memory of Gordon and his sweet and gentle good bye when I left home. They used to jump before my eyes as I floated into sleep and startled me wide-awake with a pounding heart. But I was lonely. How and why did I stand it? A whole year in New York without friends. Almost no acquaintances and swiftly bored with those I had met. Cooped up in a boarding house with men and women as nondescript as a troop of soldiers seen at a distance. And even more miserable, perhaps, than I. Those cross-street boarding houses of New York. What a vast horde of starved hopes they shelter within their dingy, smelly walls. I with my neat pad of paper spread before me each morning. Staring

through my narrow window at the patient, shabby back of the dreary house opposite. Always a bottle or a pitcher or a few cans in the windows. Windows whose wood-work had fore-sworn all color many years before, whose blinds had permanently settled into a drab blotch of grayish-green against the tired bricks; windows that leer and jeer back at me as I stare at them seeking inspiration. They depress me. Intensify my loneliness. I turn from them to my neat pad of blank paper. I stare at the white surface. It too stares back, leaps forward and recedes. What shall I write? What have I to write about? My heart sinks. The story that was to make the world sit up and stare in amazement. Where has it fled? Or was it ever there? Gordon — where is he now — a moist kiss half on the mouth, half on the cheek — suppose I can write after all — I want to get away — I can't write — I have nothing to write — I wish you were here Gordon — is that empty milk bottle going to stay in that window forever — there I am again staring through that narrow window. I jump from my chair. This won't do, I say to myself in a kind of agony. I'll take a walk in the park. Oh, dear, that terribly muggy boarding house. It's a wonder I lived through a year and a half of such a nightmare. Tommie, of course. If it had not been

for Tommie I'd have—I don't know what I would have done. I really believe I was growing desperate. Loneliness and the gnawing dread of empty, lifeless days ahead were attacking me. I faced my pad of paper each morning with a clutching fear at my heart. What could I say that this cold-blooded, swiftly passing world would give heed to? And I doubted my intelligence. I was losing the blind childish faith that brought me to New York. I wished I were at home. And the wish was killed by the knowledge of how miserable I had been there. That was impossible. But it has always been the same. Bumping into a blind alley here, stumbling out into another. Happy and excited and on top of the world one minute, the next dragged into the lowest depths—trying to run away, away from myself and every one else. Shutting the world from my imagination and substituting one of my own. Only to destroy that in turn and dream another. This mad crowd pouring down the streets under the shadows of huge, ugly piles of brick and stones, jostling, pushing, banging, tense. What is their hurry? They worry me. I walk along the street and look at them. Am I one of these? They make so much noise and go so swiftly and never cease. They mix my thinking. Nothing is good sense. A thought dies half born. Why do they

have to race like that? Are they trying to run away as I do? Are they worried too? Is each one worried by every other one as each one worries me? And a little window facing a dreary brick wall with other run-down windows jeering back and making faces. Pads of clean white paper that scorn words. Long talks with Tommie on the doorstep or in the Sixth Avenue tea room. Ugly Tommie. Reporting for a newspaper. Sneering at his work and all humanity. Laughing at everything and everybody.

— Write? — That was the first time we had spoken together. — What have you got to write? Why should you try to write to these swine? There are only two kinds: those who have the coin and those who haven't. The only difference, one tramps all over those who haven't to get it, and those who haven't trying to tramp over all the others too, but can't. All the stuff any of them want to read is something to show them how they can best do it. This is the day of selling, Miss Harding. If you want to make a living or a name you've got to sell: anything, it doesn't make any difference what. But sell. You have nothing to sell. There are a few of us, and we are growing in number, who don't want to sell. We decadents. We moderns. We expressionists. We'll have our day. But even at that I've a sneaking

suspicion we are posing just a little because we can't fall in line and try to tramp on others too. That's decadence too, to look inside yourself and rejoice in discovering that fat, comfortable lie you find reposing there while you were all unconscious of it. Your trouble is that you won't look, and it wouldn't give you any pleasure if you did, to find that you're kidding yourself as much as all the rest of us. —

Ugly Tommie with his eternal decadence. But oh how I loved it. For a while he was like a breath of cool, fresh air playing across the stale despondency of my mind. Even his repulsive ugliness fascinated me at first. We were tied by the bond of loneliness. What else could it have been? His talk. Yes, he led me into new channels, useless channels. I listened. Books had a new interest. I devoured them, devoured parts of them. Enough to discuss them glibly and with misunderstanding. Habits never die. When in all my life have I read any but the simplest novel through right from beginning to end? The half-begun books scattered and strewn along the path of my past. My unopened Shakespeare dutifully dragged into every new room or apartment and set up to let their faded backs fade yet a little more; Schopenhauer with only two essays touched; books on art, on literature, essays, poems,

biographies, plays, histories — the things I start and never finish. To-day they thrill me with a fine enthusiasm, to-morrow they have lost their meaning and I gaze at them with dread. Each in its turn becomes a task; it has become stale overnight. The world is shifting too rapidly. Where do they fit into these changing scenes? Outlines. Bring in the outlines. Give me the names and a few dates. That's all I'll take the trouble to get anyway. I think I'm sophisticated, scornful of this silly, money-thinking age, of efficient men, superior to slangy girls who try to imitate them in everything. They make life a rotten joke, I say to myself. Well, what of it? What more do I make of it? — The most beautiful thing in New York — said Tommie — is the inside of St. Patrick's at dusk. The silence. The grim outlines of the pillars and arches softened in the dim light. Slender streaks of gold stealing gently across the space in patches that gradually die against the surrounding haze. Here and there the yellow flame of a candle — so still that it might be a solid mass of metal. A man or a woman tiptoes to the center behind the pews, kneels, and makes the sign of the cross, approaches the bowl of holy water and dips in a finger, an obeisance, and tiptoes out — a remote spectre existing only in a picture. The expression

of all the longings and desires that whip us through life. It has no meaning: an emotion that justifies itself merely by being. —

I go to St. Patrick's by evening. It is as Tommie says. But I am conscious that I deliberately recall what he said of it. The beauty of it sinks into me for an instant. But I find myself asking, does that man standing nearby see that I am an unusual girl, that I am drinking this in with the emotion of one who sees the beauty of things hidden to ordinary beings? I shift my position and gaze through half closed eyes at the distant altar that he may know I am drinking in the scene as a connoisseur. I stroll out with backward glances—in this direction and that. I pass to the street and stand for a moment staring ahead. Men and women pass. What stupid people, I say to myself. I am exultant. I look down upon them with detached superiority. I can write. I shall write now while this glorious mood of genius is upon me. And I rush home. The cold breath of my tiny room strikes me. I sit down and through the window the black mass of bricks and dingily lighted windows meet my eyes unblinkingly. I am lonesome. So lonesome. I shall not write to-night. For a long time I do not move. I am depressed. I want to cry. Tommie drops into my mind. What an ass. I shudder.

ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR

Decadence, decadence and emotions and beauty. What rot. With his nasty ugly face. It's nothing but a pose. Pose. Everywhere. I want Gordon. Gordon was clean and beautiful and—I jump from my chair and switch on the light. Read. Read what? I go over them one by one. They all look dull and hopeless. I take one out and then roughly push it back. Not that. Leaning over the little blue-painted bookcase my eyes fill with tears. I rush to the bed. . .

Chlo was standing before the window. She rested her hands on the sill and glanced down into the little courtyard three flights below, where vaguely outlined was one stunted tree. In spite of the thick heat a slight shudder seized her. She felt her way past the easy chair in which she had been sitting and slipped back into the bedroom. Before getting into bed she leaned over and smoothed out the sheet.

Whoa, whoa there, old girl, you're choking up now over something that died years ago. I'm going to put everything out of my head. Every-

thing. Nothing. I shall concentrate on the word: nothing. I'm thinking of nothing. Nothing. My back itches. Nothing. One — two — three — four — Tommie was fun if he hadn't insisted on making love. Love. No. Nothing. I must think of nothing. Let's see now. One — two — three — four — Tommie was really a peach in many ways I wonder where I would have drifted if he hadn't got me the magazine job. I couldn't have kept up that joke of writing forever. I owe him a lot I suppose. But his eternal insinuations and love making! And he grew so morbid and violent about it. If I had shown a grain of sense. But no man had ever acted that way before toward me. How was I to know how to handle him? I never dreamed that a man could make love in so — so roughly. Oh, I had a lot to learn then. But what's it all worth after it's learned? Am I any better off now than I was then? I doubt it. No happier at least; lonesome as I was, I had some queer sort of faith and ideals to fall back on; now I've lost those. Only dreams are left. Silly, unutterable dreams that sicken me with remorse when I wake for an instant and see them for what they are. And I go back to them and back to them in spite of myself. When Tommie grabbed me and pulled me into his arms. That morbid wandering reception room with its

dingy red plush sofa and cheap garish landscape painting hovering over it — what a horrid, shivery room to make love in! Without warning. Whispering. Almost growling. His moist thick lips and his hot, heavy breath sending cold shivers down my back as they pressed against my cheeks, my neck, penetrated to my breast through my blouse. We fought. Oh, how we fought. — You little fool. . . . Kiss me. . . . You damned little flirt. . . . I'm . . . going to . . . have you. . . . The coarse hair of his cheek scraping my skin; one of his arms clutching me around the waist against him; the other feeling its way down my body as I struggled to stop it. I tore loose from him. Frantic despair broke me loose. I vaguely knew my blouse was ripped. I rushed upstairs. I locked the door. First the trunk; then chair; and table. Afraid to turn on the light — afraid to go to bed. Standing in the black center of my room with every muscle and nerve drawn and trembling and only expelling my breath when I could hold it no longer. Why, I wonder, didn't I scream when he took hold of me? Why did I not call some one afterward? Shame? I wonder. How long did I stand there? It must have been a long time. I lay down on the bed without undressing, listening to the beating of my heart. And gradually — good heavens,

how clearly I can remember that curious, baffling feeling — and how often I've thought of it since: fear slowly giving way to that — that what? That — that queer sensual craving. Vague — undefined — uncomfortable. A restless longing. I hated Tommie. I loathed and despised him. I shuddered every time he passed back or forth through my chaotic nightmare. But — I wanted suddenly to be loved. It burst over me with the shock of a cold shower. I gasped and shivered. And my imagination took hold of the idea and flew in circles with it, disappeared, and back again. I got up and stripped off my clothes, standing and shivering beside the bed in the dark and crawled quickly under the covers, cuddled there in a knot, neither thinking nor dreaming. Yet a thousand pictures whirling at a terrific speed before me. I can recall it so plainly. As if I had actually stood by and watched and seen my mind jump through hoops. It's so clear to me now. And Gordon. I remember that. One minute — or was it second? — I draw back in disgust from the touch of Tommie and the next I was reaching out my arms to Gordon. What a peculiar thing. I don't believe that Gordon had ever entered my mind in that guise before. I'm sure he hadn't. I had thought of him. Yes, I know I had. But only vaguely and in that stupid

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romantic way I had. That's *awfully* funny; I had never thought — well, I'll be darned! That's the very first time I ever dreamed of Gordon as my love. I'm sure of it; as sure of it as anything in the world. I'll bet anything that's when it all started. Because I know how I fought against those things before and what a dreadful beast I was for even having to struggle against them. But why — why did I give up so suddenly to dreams of Gordon? And at such a time? Frightened out of my wits — feverish. This terrified loathing and shrinking and fear turned in a second to an exquisite, overwhelming sensation that was almost an ecstasy. All night. And towards morning I lay straight and still. As deliberately as a machine I held the picture of Gordon before me, staring into the darkness with wide open eyes, seeing myself and Gordon together. I stand in the center of a lovely bedroom all lavender and pinks. Low, soft lights cast a suffused glow. He steps forward, gently lifts me, carries me without effort to the *chaise longue*, and abandons me to its cushioned depths. He kneels at my side and caresses my hand with his slender, beautiful fingers. Slowly he leans toward me. His lips find my neck. My chin. My cheeks. My mouth. My hands reach for his and remain there. He is fumbling with the top hook

of my negligee. I offer no resistance. His movement is awkward. His head is pressed against my breast. Such beautiful, painful torture . . . delicious torture.

Oh — oh. Yes. That was the beginning I'm sure. I had never dreamed of any man that way before. And I was deep into it before I realized what I was doing. I looked forward to these dreams as something precious, anxious to get home and be alone where I could close my eyes and fall into delicious reveries." Before I realized. Always Gordon. And they grew and grew. I couldn't stop them. When I tried to stop them I couldn't. When black days came they were my refuge. They became another life. And yet I could see that; I could see what they were doing to me. Then why didn't I stop them? Let's see. If I know the origin of them now that ought to make it easy to end them. If you find the beginning of these things you ought to be able to bring it all out in the daylight and discard it for good. But I've always recalled that night, and it seems to make no difference. I wanted him anyway. I — I don't know. Perhaps that's not it after all. No. I don't know what it is. I've never tried to forget that night; I've thought of it many, many times. But why should Gordon have returned to me so vividly? Why does he keep re-

turning? And keep returning? Why did I have this silly feeling that life would be impossible without him? And yet it seemed to make little difference whether in the flesh or not. The Gordon of my imagination was not the same Gordon that I bumped into on Fifth Avenue that wet afternoon. They have become fused. I can't tear them apart. But I know I was surprised when I first talked to him. I could have gone on indefinitely with the Gordon I had created; I could never have given him up. I wanted to; but I couldn't. How many times have I resolved bitterly to throw his image out of my life, to start my mind along new paths? In the clear light of the day — yes. But at night in the dark lonesomeness of my room he hovers over me until I give myself up to him. I, the hater of marriage, couldn't give myself up! Bah! But I'm no worse than every one else. All the people I've ever known are always talking and thinking one thing and doing just the opposite. And they talk and talk. And preach and preach. How many really mean what they say? They think they do, but they don't. All they're trying to do is to sell themselves. For what? Sell. Sell. Sell. I'm not what I am. But I'll sell you what I am anyway. Cordie does as an excuse for a lover. Tommie did it as an excuse for failure. J. P. does it as an

excuse for chasing dollars. And Gordon—he sells his emotions. What else? What person have I met yet who isn't posing to hide something? Or to obtain something? I'm like this—or—this is what I feel about such things—or—I think so and so.— Selling. The age of selling we ought to call it. Selling ourselves to ourselves and to each other. J. P. thinks it's wonderful. —The greatest little game in the world—this selling. There's a real kick to bringing a hard nut to terms. You walk into a prospect's office knowing that he's all set to fight every argument you bring up. He's sitting back in his swivel chair waiting, planning how he can turn you down. He's a smart man; he's been up against a great many hard-boiled salesmen. The depression has made him tougher than ever. It's like playing a game of chess with big stakes. You try to figure out his line of thought and anticipate him. He's trying to get your number too. And you have it out. Yes, sir, it's a great game. It's not only in business. Politics is just the same. Writers; architects; actors; preachers; even doctors and lawyers these days—they are all selling themselves like mad. They've got to do it. Competition will knock them in the eye if they don't. And it's a splendid thing too; for old man competition makes the world go around. That's

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why we are the most progressive people living: we put everything on a competitive basis and fight it out. Yes, sir, it's a great game. —

I suppose it is. I suppose every word he utters is a part of his selling talk. How entirely different he is from Gordon. And yet — yet I was willing to work for him; to see him in the office each day; finally to go out with him evenings and — Cordie and Willa thought it was fine. They would. They're practical. — I'm living in this world — here and now, — Cordie said, — and I want to get out of it every little drop of happiness I can. And, believe me, money is not beyond my calculations if I see it hanging around within my reach. I'd give up Johnnie to-morrow — and he's a wonderful lover — if I had the chance to marry a man who had sufficient money for me to travel and see the things of this world that are just waiting for me to look them over. Don't be so absurd, Chlo. J. P.'s better than any of that acting and writing bunch you used to go with when you were doing press-agent stuff. J. P. is falling for you hard. And you had better snatch the chance. You're getting morbid. I wish to goodness you'd let me psych you. You've got something rotting inside your head that needs the air. But never mind — if you keep up this coldness and reserve J. P. is going to let you go.

A man might fall for that stuff for a while but he'll soon tire of it. —

Coldness and reserve. If she only knew. That's stupid. She does know. She's known ever since we first talked together. That's why she insisted that I should share the apartment with her and Willa. She's trying to dig down to the bottom of me all the while. And it's been so horribly embarrassing. I've wanted to confide in her and I couldn't. I love her enough to tell her anything — yet I couldn't; I couldn't tell her all the detestable thoughts and dreams that arise and attack me. What good would it do? Well, she would have understood, and that might have helped. Why didn't I? The talks we have had. When she used to curl up on the foot of my bed and lecture me. She's an angel. Even if she is big and boisterous and has such awful taste in hats and clothes, she's a perfect angel.

— Chlo — I'm terribly fond of you. But I can't quite make you out sometimes. What are you getting out of life? What are you trying to get out of it? We simply have to drag you out to get you to play in the evening. The men who take you out all seem to bore you more or less. And you never let yourself go; you're always so tense and reserved. You read too much and you skip around so you never seem to get any-

where with it. And yet you've got plenty of bean. Forgive me, dear, but I can't help but notice these things. And I'm so fond of you it really worries me. You seem to be drawing in on yourself more and more. It's not healthy. Won't you tell me what it is, Chlo? Maybe old Cordie can help a little. Now what *is* it all about, dear? —

Cordie is a peach.

— Nothing is the matter, Cordie. I'm just born that way I guess. I'm shy of course. But I get happiness out of life, only I haven't a very playful disposition. I enjoy my work; I like to read; I like to go to a good show. Just because I don't kick up my heels more is no sign —

— Now, Chlo, that's not sporting. You know you're not telling the truth. Honestly, what are you trying to get out of life? Where do you think you are bound? You're certainly unhappy right now about something. —

— No, truly, Cordie, I'm not unhappy really. Oh, I *am* unhappy I suppose. I don't know why. Life seems to me rather stupid; it has for an awfully long time. I think it always has. Every one rushing and fighting so hard about nothing; taking themselves so seriously. And the men you talk about: they only have two subjects of conversation, and both are worn out. Themselves

and their business and themselves and love. Isn't there anything left in the world but business and book talk and love making? —

— But, my dear, you are the one taking things seriously. Not these people you speak of. You mustn't talk like that. You'll have me thinking you've lost your sense of humor completely. Tell me — do you believe in a God? —

— No. I don't think so. I can't bring myself to believe there is some single, all-powerful intelligence that's either over us or a part of us. The whole idea I think is a sort of club to threaten igno—

— I know what you mean. But why do you feel so down on marriage? —

— Why? Because I think it's stupefying and stultifying. Because it's so dreadfully unfair. What chance has a woman if she once gets tied down to a home and raising children? Think of the married women you know — how many of them ever escape the monotonous treadmill once they're caught? I'll keep my freedom, thank you. I'd rather be my own mistress than struggle for future generations. Don't you agree with me? —

— Well, of course I don't think you have to have children if you don't wish to. I don't want any now, but I do believe sooner or later every

woman wants children. It's a part of old nature. I think I will some time and I think you will some day too. But if you're so down on marriage and have no moral scruples, why don't you have a lover? You ought to do something, Chlo. Either you ought to get married or take a lover, one of the two. Please forgive me for being so brutally frank about it, but to my cock-eyed glance it looks as if you have gone a pretty long time bucking against realities, and I think it's plain downright unhealthy. Don't you ever feel the desire . . . the need of a man? —

— No. That is, I don't think about it; I keep my mind off it. You're being absurd, Cordie. There's not a thing in the world the matter with me. I'm quiet of course. But — but — oh, let's talk of something else, please, Cordie dear. —

But I lied. Probably she knew I lied. Even while we talked, Gordon was flashing back and forth across my mind until I was afraid I would call his name. I was so determined that I would not and could not give away such a secret that I was sure that I would blurt out his name in spite of myself. Did I want a lover? How many, many times I've thought I did. Yes, Cordie is right. I will check this unhealthy mood before it's too late, I said to myself. I will give myself to Dean. Cordie is right. It is the normal, the

healthy thing to do. Dean is sympathetic; he is gentle; he is understanding. Yes, I will become his mistress, I decide firmly. I say to myself as I have so often said, see this through; don't be a prude now. You are fond of him and he says he adores you; you need him badly. Back and forth I argue. We sit at tea and I study him; his high intellectual forehead, his long slightly bony neck, tight dry skin. Unintentionally I revolt. I compare. My image intervenes. No. No. I cannot love Dean. Not this writing machine. I can't bear to think of him this way. And suddenly I am physically tired and bored. He talks of plots and characters and books, and life becomes futile. Galsworthy and Wells and Walpole and Huxley versus Dreiser and Cather and Lewis and Hemmingway. England versus America. On and on.

—There is no great difference between the English and American novelist to-day. Each country has the equivalent of the other. The reviewers create the difference. Book reviewing has developed into one of the most vicious habits we have in this country. One newspaper finds it produces profitable advertising and all the others take it up. So they have to hire amateurs to fill space—these adjective hounds with their 'devastating' and 'vivid' and 'compelling' and 'enormous' and 'unswerving'—good Lord, do

you know what one little beggar said of my *Cup of Froth*? He said, it is vital and breathes of life, but lacks that deftness, that skilful shading of nuances in the choice of words, a lack which so often relieves American novels of the vivid qualities that should be theirs by right! Tripe! If that chap knew that I once spent two solid hours to find one word, just one word, he'd sing a different tune. Now, if an Englishman had written it. . . .

He is thinking of his writing, not of me. He will always think of his writing. As writing. His emotions were weighings and comparings. Exhausted on styles. I study him. I can love his mind, perhaps, not his body. Not his dry, thin neck. I turn back to my image of Gordon. Always on the verge of the cliff I stand, always shrinking back, shifting from reality to my — and then the dream actually turns to reality! And there is Gordon before me; day after day; within my reach. And I want him — this reality. My beautiful dreams are dissolved into thin vapors before the stinging desire for him in the flesh. He is so — so beautiful. And — I can see only bleak blank days without him. And then! Great God, what a joke. What a miserable joke it has all been. To find I couldn't give myself without marriage; in spite of all my talk, all my deter-

mination, I must have marriage. Well — I've received what was coming to me I suppose. But I couldn't see it when Gordon first came within my horizon again. I always see too late. I must have marriage; he had to marry me. What terrible days and nights those were, from the moment I left his studio with all my pride trampled under his feet. To ask a man to marry me; then to be gently scolded as if I were a child. To murder my proposal with the same words I had used to kill his so many years before that I might have forgotten I had said them. What utter humiliation! And yet even my humiliation could not down my — my what? My desire, I suppose. I must have him, I thought. I repeated it to myself, I must have him. I can't do without him; he's got to marry me; I'll make him marry me; I'll make him do it. He's lying. I know he's lying. A pose — just another pose. He's lying. If he loves me he'll marry me in the end. I'll make him marry me. He can't help it. He's just talking — as I was talking. I'll make him do it. I'll make him.

9

Chlo gave a slight convulsive jerk as if to ward off a blow, and then lay still and quiet.

That nightmare of a night. How did I ever manage to leave Gordon's studio and reach home? I was only conscious of shame, nauseating shame that sickened me. I had proposed to a man and he had coolly turned me down, gently upbraided me as though I had been a hysterical child, bargained for my body as one might bid at an auction. These were the thoughts that assailed me. I had thrown myself at his feet and groveled and he had in effect patted my head and said, there, there, my child we mustn't be absurd; here's what we will do, little girl. The sudden cutting

thought that he was deliberately getting back at me for the calm way I had turned him down ten years before, then the thought that he was sitting back in his studio laughing at me, or perhaps sneering at me for a prude. How could I have thrown my pride away and begged and cried for a man to marry me? How could I? How could I? All night this horrible question intruded. I could never see him again; I would never be able to look him in the face. But what difference, after all, did it make, I wearily asked myself. I would never see him again anyway. He did not want to see me now. Certainly I would not want to see him. I would go away. Leave New York. I would slip quietly off to some small town and live alone. Secluded and mysterious. I would remain aloof from the world and its pettiness. But I had so very little money saved. Ah, well, I would write. I knew life now. A new genius before whom the far-away world would humbly bow. And I saw Cezanne tramping alone through the fields and hills surrounding Aix, misunderstood and despised, painting his way to future glory. Then I recalled what Gordon had told me of Cezanne and his bitter life—the recollection shattered my dream of genius. The present was back staring me in the face. I sat up in bed and tried to make myself go over in

logical order all we had said and done that evening. It was impossible. I could only see I had been a tremendous fool. I had made it impossible for myself to go back to him now under any conditions. Pride forbade me. But why should I have worried about pride? I had been honest. Had Gordon? Had he really meant what he said? A quick suspicion assailed me. What a shock that was. Perhaps he was merely bluffing. The idea hit me full in the face. Very well, if he was like that I'd soon show him. No man in this world could experiment with me as if I were some chemical to be poured from one retort into another. I was through. I would never see him again no matter what amends he tried to make. If he had really loved me he would not have let me go on talking. He would have interrupted. He would have asked me to marry him without leading me on to ask him.

I remember how I repeated over and over: I wouldn't see him or talk to him if he dragged himself on his knees to my doorstep. I was indignant. Oh, what a horrible beast, I decided, he was. Like all other men, I thought; they're all the same, egotists; I shall never have anything to do with any man again. But in the midst of my scorn, and before I realized it, I was living over again our first evening in his studio. He stood

pressing me to him. . . . I was beating my arms wildly . . . his face against mine . . . beautiful pain . . . exquisite pain . . . why, why didn't — oh dear, I mustn't think of that. I lived it over in a passing second and a great feeling of renunciation lifted me. I was happy in my surge of unhappiness. My principles had stood firm against his — his onslaughts. I had the feeling that I had done something big and great and noble. The moral heroism of my own action raised a lump of tearful admiration in my throat.

Renunciation! How graciously a mood assumes a lie to save our tottering self-respect. Did I not know in the bottom of my heart that I had not renounced Gordon? Would I not have given my right hand for the courage to throw myself into his arms and have him take me as he would? Never mind. Lie or no lie, I'm glad it gave me some relief from the torturing knowledge of what a fool I had been. It made it easier to drag myself from bed in the morning and face Cordie and Willa. Even so I dreaded that ordeal. I was sure that the whole of the evening was written in my face.

— You must have come in awfully late last night. —

— Yes. —

— I was late myself but I must have been dead

to the world when you came in. What time was it? —

— I'm not sure. —

— Show any good? —

— All right.

— Say, Chlo, you look all dragged out this morning. Why don't you take the day off and put in a good sleep and rest? I'll tell J. P. for you. —

— No, I'm all right. Truly. —

I thought I caught a glance passing between the two. I wasn't sure. But I was furious; I boiled with resentment. Later they would talk about me. What right had they to pry into my affairs? It was no one's business if I felt seedy, if I had stayed out late and was tired. I had no appetite but sat at the table nursing my resentment until Cordie got up. I couldn't bear to leave the two together. I was afraid they would start discussing me. Every word seemed to have a hidden meaning. My imagination was distorting; I felt that they were slyly watching and studying me. It grew almost unbearable. Willa munching, munching toast with a steady rhythm that to my overdrawn nerves was a deliberate insolence. A calculated desire to irritate me. I wanted to scream. Anything to break this munchy silence. I was relieved when Cordie finally

jumped up and rushed into her coat and hat. I joined her and we set out for the office. She talked inconsequentially and steadily and I answered in monosyllables. I remember so plainly. I knew that she knew something had horribly upset me and I knew she was being flip and casual on purpose. The knowledge angered me and fed my resentment. I'm going off somewhere to live alone, I said to myself sullenly. I'm going to find a place where I can be myself when I want to. How often I've thought of that. When I'm rushing around and seeing a lot of people I think how wonderful it would be to be alone, to read and study and think. Then when I get alone I have the feeling that I am forgotten, lost and out of the world. I want to be back with people even more than I wanted to escape them. Oh, dear, what is the answer? I had made up my mind that I was finished with Gordon forever. I hated him. I would put him out of my life.

Yet the instant my phone rang that morning, great heavens, how my heart jumped. I hesitated to take off the receiver. Yet I was expecting this call. In spite of my bitter shame and all my resolutions I actually believe that behind my raving stood the hope that he would. And yet I was unprepared. Unprepared and bewildered.

Immediately I heard his voice I had an insane desire to hang up the receiver and run. But I couldn't. I couldn't release the phone; I couldn't resist answering. Against my will, I admitted it was I speaking.

— Chlo, please tell me you're not angry. —

— Angry? I? Of course not, Gordon. Why should I be angry? — Why did I give such an absurd answer? Beating around the bush like a child of sixteen. But my voice must have belied my words. Of course it did. I had difficulty in controlling it. And I could read anxiety in his reply.

— You're sure, Chlo? I was a brute. You — you're perfectly sure? —

— I tell you I am not angry. I was a simple idiot. I should be the one to apologize. It was just the show or something. I was a bit overwrought, that was all. I can see your point of view. Everything is perfectly all right. Please, Gordon. I'd rather forget it all. —

— All right, Chlo, if you're sure. Only — I do want to apologize for the way I spoiled your evening. Won't you let me see you this evening. I have so much I want to tell you. Will you, Chlo? Let's go to the Colony for dinner. —

— No, Gordon, I'm sorry. I can't. —

— To-morrow then? —

— No, Gordon. Not to-morrow either. —

— When, Chlo? —

— Never. —

— Why Chlo, I — I — what — I thought you said you weren't angry. —

Stupid fool! Oh, how furious he made me. How dared he say that!

— I said I was not angry, Gordon, and I meant it. I have simply thought the whole thing over and it's just impossible to go on this way. That's all there is to it. I angry? Don't be ridiculous. I merely consider it time to stop. So I don't think we had better see each other any more. Good bye. —

I rang off before he had the chance to answer. But what a curious reaction. Depressed and exhilarated; exhilarated and depressed. Neither the one nor the other. Both. He loved me. He was afraid he had hurt me. But no. He still thought he could have things his way. He still thought I would give in. No. No. No. He truly loved me. Whether he wanted to marry me or not he loved me. Ah, yes. I was sure of that. Nothing now could rob me of that belief. If I did anything during the rest of the day I don't know what it was. I returned over and over to our conversation over the phone; I strove to recall each word he had spoken; I tried to re-

member his accentuations; I repeated his sentences and sought hidden meanings behind them. It was a monotonous job from which I was unable to refrain. The attempt to construct the state of mind behind his words was exhausting. As fast as I reached a conclusion I decided it was wrong and discarded it. Rehashing conversations. I do it so often. Now what was behind this remark and what was meant by that? It's such a useless habit. I wish I could stop it. But certainly any one would have been upset after what I had been through that night. I'm too quick to blame myself, anyway: making mountains out of mole hills. Why shouldn't I have been upset? I wonder what I should have done if J. P. hadn't stepped into the picture at such a psychological moment. Things would have turned out very differently, I'll bet that. I wish I had never seen him that day. I wish—but what's the use of wishing—it's too late now. But when it came then—nothing less than an inspiration, I thought then.

The irony of it. A queer kind of inspiration J. P. gave me. More the dream of a romantic school girl than the inspiration of a grown woman. But when we met in the elevator and he insisted on walking home with me, the idea came as a stroke of genius. Why not use J. P.

as a whip on Gordon. Oh, ho! Here was an idea. Here was the way to make Gordon marry me. I wouldn't let him see me or come near me. But — J. P. complained so bitterly because I gave him so few engagements — all right — I would give him all the evenings he wished until he was fairly sick of them. He could have any evening only — how clever I thought I was being — I was to decide where we were to eat or dance or what shows we were to see. Oh, yes, I was clever. Puh! An unhatched egg is what I really was. But gracious, I was delighted; I was elated. The air tasted good. The very noise of the street was buoyant. I would make J. P. take me to dinner at Gordon's favorite eating places; I would sweep in on J. P.'s arm absorbed in his conversation, unaware of the stares Gordon would give; I would sit through dinner intent on every word J. P. uttered, unconscious of Gordon and the room around me; I would do it night after night. I would hound Gordon — I would ignore him. That would make him jealous; that would soon bring him to terms. Yes. I walked home with J. P. with joy in my heart. Everything now looked so easy and simple. I would teach Gordon a lesson. As we strolled homeward, for the first time I felt a quick fondness for J. P. I listened with new ears to what he was saying. His words fitted

my mood. A former time and I would have said, Babbitt. But now they rang true and full. I listened gleefully as I toyed with my new plan.

— By George, Miss Harding, this has been a great day. I think I've just about got that Wilson & Snyder contract. It's been tough pulling but I got under their skins to-day. Snyder came right out at the meeting and shot at me, "Well, how would you sell our soap then?" Trying to lead me on, you see. But no sir, I was waiting for that question. Mr. Snyder, I came back quickly, I have absolutely no idea. He wasn't expecting an answer like that and it — er — took him back a bit. "Well, well," he said trying to be sarcastic, "after talking with us for the last two months you haven't any ideas yet; two agencies have already given us complete advertising plans for the year, and a third has given us an analysis; but you have nothing to offer except — er — your reputation — is that it?" Well, that was just what I was waiting for. I leaned over the table and looked him squarely in the eye and I spoke very slowly.

No, sir, that is not it. Not by a long shot. Suppose you had a very sick daughter (you know, he has a daughter about nineteen, quite a charming girl, and I was striking a soft spot), and suppose I was a doctor and you came to my office

for advice, and then suppose I wrote out a — er — prescription and some rules without ever going to see and examine the patient, would you take my advice? Would you trust your daughter to such a doctor? Frankly now, would you sir? Then I waited a moment and hit the table with my fist.

No sir, you would not! You'd go to a specialist and you'd expect him to make a thorough examination before he started prescribing anything. That's what you'd do, sir. Am I right? I stopped there. It's — er — a great thing to know when to shut up. I didn't say another word. Let that sink in, I said to myself. And by George, it did. Old Wilson was there, you know, and after a while he began nodding his head.

"That's horse sense, Snyder, you can't get away from that; it's good hard horse sense."

Well, I think I cinched it. I think we've got the account. — It's a great game, this advertising, Miss Harding; it's er — more representative of our age and times than anything I know. The speed, the power, the gigantic scale on which it puts business; the way it keys up our lives, sets us a pace to go through life. A lot of people try to sneer at it and say it's a lot of tricks — that it oversold the country and even was the cause of the depression. But by George, when you think

of how it's freed working people from stagnation and set new standards of living and brought every kind of necessity and even luxury into the homes of almost every one. Yes, sir, and look at these buildings around us: the tremendous size of them. Yet—they get all their meaning, all their—er—real beauty, if you know what I mean, from the human beings that fill them and pour in and out. Why, the Radio City buildings alone hold a city of people. Think of it. It's—why it's almost beyond imagination, the big off-hand way we do things to-day. And look at these crowds pouring down the street, the noise and rush and bustle. By George, Miss Harding, this is civilization. It's the first time the world has ever been really alive. Noise and rush *is* life. What else is there to it? To keep going, moving, struggling . . . by George. . . .

I recalled the poignant quiet of the Sunday afternoons Gordon and I had spent in strolling through deserted lower New York. But they shone vaguely as through a far distant past. Yes, these streets were vivid and alive and the noise and great buildings seemed to have definite, concrete meaning. I had a sensation of grasping this meaning. But only for a second. I tried to catch and hold it. For an instant Gordon flashed through my mind as a pathetic child. His so-

phistication was a tissue-paper suit of armor. But I looked again. The meaning had fled. There was only a huge crowd of tired men and women walking at breakneck speed; only a noise of whistles and motor horns; only piles of stone that darkened the streets before the sun was down. I could see Gordon serene and unmoved in his ascetic studio, tall, burnt-orange walls broken only by the brilliantly colored *Bathers*. Sanity. I wanted him sharply. And I hugged my idea to my breast and nursed it.

When I think — what an absurdly funny two weeks I spent. And how funny it must have been to J. P. Letting me drag him night after night to restaurants he must have loathed. But he *was* a good sport about it. I can see that disgusted expression when I named some place he particularly disliked. — Well, by George, Chlo, I can't quite understand your taste in these matters. You know it's no real fun to eat in these crowded, smoky little rooms. And everybody in the place looks queer. And that Colony — it tries to be so high-hat and it's so deadly quiet. Can't we go to the Ritz or Pierre's just for one night? — But he always gave in. And after all the nasty things he says about highbrow shows, how I must have made him suffer. He *is* wonderfully good at bottom; much too good for me. Why must he get

on my nerves so terribly? Why do I find him so physically repulsive? He's successful. And popular. Other women like him tremendously. Oh, well — there it is and I can't help it. He's so — so. . . .

The first evening that we ran into Gordon at dinner I was startled, although I had been deliberately making J. P. take me to every restaurant Gordon liked — one after another. I knew how I would act, didn't I? I would sweep by carelessly, indifferently. A distant nod as I passed; then forgetful of his presence; a deep interest in my partner; a vivacity. But gracious, I wasn't expecting Gordon to act as he did. When he rose from his seat and stared at me. It was dreadfully stupid of me to stop and stare back. I catch myself and bow slightly and walk on. He has on the softly rough, deep-brown suit I love and he has a girl with him but I am afraid to glance his way again. I am miserable. I have made a mess of things. And every time the waiter comes to our table I am sure it is Gordon. Instead of the vivacity and joy I was going to show for Gordon's benefit I am nervous and absent-minded. I wonder who the girl is. Has he already forgotten me?

I'm a logical creature! Here I was asking myself all these foolish questions when ever since

my proposal he had been trying to phone me several times a day. But at least I had the pride to give myself a good scolding when I got home that night. I was a little better afterwards. I can't understand now how I continued to stick it out; I had only one purpose in me—he had to marry me. And I was living, living on this despairing hope that he would want me so much he would finally give in and propose. How could that have been me? But it was. I don't see how J. P. stood me. I could not help but become sarcastic with him; my nerves stayed on edge. Two whole weeks of this. Blocking J. P.'s attempts at proposals; waiting for something to happen—I did not know what. It's a wonder I didn't go mad. And then that night in the Colony. In the quiet restful grays of the Colony, of all places. No. It was natural if it was to happen anywhere. But why did I do it? Why? It seems so utterly impossible now. So utterly, utterly impossible. Why, why, why did I do it?

Chlo was still lying quietly on her back as though in a deeply restful sleep, save that a slight frown ploughed its narrow furrow of concentration between her wide-open, unseeing eyes. The slow beat of a scarcely audible snore from the next bed gently penetrated the dark silence of the room.

I was so weary that night, so weary and depressed with my fruitless chase. A lifetime prisoner, I imagine, must pace up and down in his narrow cell in much the same despondent and stubborn haze that enwrapped me when I entered the Colony with J. P. It might have been

last night. So many times in that past three weeks had we encountered Gordon — I was unnerved at the thought of bowing to him again. These forced encounters suddenly become a monstrous stupidity; they must be so obvious — so dreadfully crude. At the last moment I rebuke myself bitterly for going there. I can't bow to him; I am sure my legs will refuse to move when I reach the door. This has gone too far. I glance hastily through the door. Of course Gordon would be there. What a temptation it is to rush out, to make J. P. take me far away from this place. I enter the ladies' room and make a pretense of rouging and powdering my face. A subterfuge to give me time to fight, to restore my poise. A clear beam of reason has penetrated the fog of emotion that has been driving me evening after evening in search of Gordon, the clear light that flashes for a second and is gone as I try to grasp it. If it could only endure; but it goes as it comes, and stupefies. I am unnerved at the thought of sitting in this room where Gordon is. How serious and tired my face in the mirror. Surely nothing in life can be as serious as the story my face tells in the mirror. — I'm sorry I kept you waiting so long J. P. —

Yes, Gordon is there with a girl. What is she like? I cannot see. I dare not look. I dare not

turn my head to speak for fear I cannot turn it back. Horrid thought. And so the waiter must seat us in an alcove directly opposite Gordon and his girl. Is she a model, I wonder? Thank goodness, we sit profile and not full face, that, at least, is a relief.

—What did you say, J. P.? I beg your pardon for not listening — you order for me this evening. I'm always envious of what you order for yourself — it usually looks so much more tempting than mine when it comes; I'll take whatever you take this time. —

The front of my head feels tight as if some one were pulling from each side. I hope J. P. doesn't propose or insist on talking advertising and codes this evening. If he does either I'll scream. I'm weary of hearing business and politics. I'm weary of running after Gordon; I'm weary of J. P. and his proposals. I wish I were home. No I don't. J. P. is comfortable, like old bedroom slippers. I don't have to talk to him if I don't wish; he'll talk. Heaven knows he'll not run out of words. Words and a hearty handshake are his capital. What is he saying? I must keep my mind off Gordon. I feel as if his eyes are completely fastened on me. Is he really looking at me or do I just think it? What is J. P. saying? He's been awfully sweet to me

after the way I treat him. I can't help it. He is so eternally sure of himself. But yet he's decent in lots of ways. If only he were not so Babbitty and his skin were not — Gordon and his smooth white — oh, dear!

— Chlo! Have you gone deaf or have you found a more interesting world of your own? —

— No, please, J. P., I'm all ears. Your words shall be engraved on my heart. Now what did you say?

— Nothing. It was really nothing. But, Chlo, I should like to ask you a question if you don't mind. —

— Of course not. What is it? —

My reply is apathetic. I am not interested in anything he may say. I watch his thick muscular fingers as they fumble for a match, the little tufts of hair on the backs. Then I glance at his face curiously. His olive-red face spotted with its thick closely clipped moustache. A moustache is not — not sanitary. It's bound to pick up germs and dirt. But it does help to keep his jaw from looking so square. A prize-fighter's jaw. J. P. does everything with a purpose; he always says he does. Did he grow his moustache on purpose to tone down his jaw? Gordon is smooth shaven and his cheek curves evenly. He's sitting across from us with a girl. I'm not interested in J. P.

He bores me. He ought not to stand for me treating him as I do; I have no use for a man who lets a woman make a fool of him. He's an idiot to let me drag him out just to follow Gordon. If his purpose in this case is to marry me he's sadly mistaken. But he should know by now. I've stopped him often enough, heaven knows. It's mean of me to — what is this he's saying?

. . . like a woman in love or with some heavy worry hanging over you. I don't mean to be fresh, but you know how I feel towards you, Chlo, and I can't help but see. Isn't there anything I can do to help you? Anything at all? By George, I'd do anything to see a real smile on your face again — even if its sarcastic — as — er — it is so often. —

I can feel myself redden.

— No, thanks just the same, J. P. Your eagle selling eye has made a mistake. You don't see a thing out of the ordinary about me. A little seedy perhaps. But a few weeks of writing copy on *Delise — the rouge, madam, wafting the rosy charm of lovely youth* — is enough to remove a little color from one's cheeks. —

— Sarcasm again. Chlo, why —

— No, you do me an injustice. A joke. And a very good one I think. —

— But seriously, Chlo, you are looking a bit

tired, you know. And you've been absent-minded and — er — moody for weeks. Honestly, I think a trip and a rest —

— But I don't want a rest. I'm all right, I tell you. If I stay serious for a moment you either advise a rest or propose marriage, and I don't want either. It's been very sweet of you to take me out like this but —

— But if I don't like things as they are I can lump it. Is that what you mean? —

— That's neither nice nor polite of you, J. P., and you know I didn't intend to say anything of the kind. But —

— But when all's said and done you don't really think a great deal of me, do you, Chlo? —

— You're acting awfully contrary this evening. That's a very foolish question. Would I go out with you as I do if I didn't like you? —

— Well, frankly, that's what I'm trying to figure out myself. I seem to bore you quite easily. You're more often sarcastic with me than otherwise. In fact, I think you are just a bit contemptuous of some of my likes and dislikes — as much as your — er — fastidiousness will allow you to be. And yet I love you deeply. In spite of it all I should like you to be my wife. Let's play fair. Put your cards on the table and let's have everything above board just once. I've never

tried to break past your limits before: tell me, what is it that you don't like about me? Just this once. I won't make a murmur; why am I so impossible as a — er — prospective husband? —

He has never talked this way before. What has come over him and what is he leading up to? I have a twinge of uneasiness. The naked fact that I have been using him without consideration strikes me forcibly. I have a twinge of remorse. It sets my head spinning and for an instant his grimly smiling eyes and set mouth with stubby moustache dance before me. Then anger. How dare he put such a question to me. All right. He becomes indistinct. I'm sick and tired of everything. I don't care. I'll tell him why. If he wants to end it let him. Advertising and rouge and selling; selling. I'll tell him why. I've never wanted to hurt any one quite so much as I do at this moment.

— Do you really want to know, J. P.? I thought we had settled this marriage discussion before. But on your head be it. Now let me see. First, I don't like your type. Oh — I like you well enough; I think there are a great many fine things about you. But I don't like what you stand for. You're so unutterably typical of everything that makes life in this country to-day a — a — well — a huge cynical cosmic joke. Tell me — have you

ever read any of Mencken? You *have*? Oh! . . . Well — well, you know what I mean. All this making a god of business and false brotherhood and handshaking and Rotarian love songs, this — this talk of ideals and service — you've read *Main Street* and *Babbitt* I know. And you've laughed at them and thought how ridiculous they were and petty, haven't you? But did you ever stop to think that you are just about like Babbitt yourself in many ways? You're not so crude as he's painted, more subtle and refined. But if I let you, you'd do nothing but talk of advertising, and service, and your conferences with clients, and what they said and what you said, and how you pulled the trick that took them in, and how the other people had fallen down on service, and what a wonderful product and what a wonderful sale it ought to have if only its true merits were shown to the public in the right way, and what a great good we are going to do the public by putting it in all their homes; or if it's not that, it's the new country club you think you'd better join to get in right with a big manufacturer, or some talk over the radio by Mr. Ump on ideals to restore prosperity, or the total number of motor cars this year compared with 1932. If it's a show you see or a book you read, the biggest thing in it to you is some new idea that can be

translated into advertising. And I hate the jazz music you rave about. It's — it's not music at all. It's just a tricky beat and flourish — like the flourishes people used to put in writing when Spence-rian was the fashion when you were a kid; or like — like imitating a negro — using correct words but mispronouncing them for effect. Your admiration for a picture is drawn either from its sentiment or its selling qualities. You're just the same way in everything, if you want to know. We don't live in the same world; and I have very little respect for your world. There it is. I'm sorry. I suppose that's the end. I really didn't mean to hurt you, but you asked me. —

I lean back and close my eyes, glad that I have spoken. It has calmed and rested my nerves. What difference does it all make? I ask myself; it's much better than that we should go on as we are. Now I can —

J. P. is speaking.

— Hurt? Bless your heart, I'm not hurt, Chlo. I'm mighty glad you've said what you have. It — it simplifies things a great deal. You've been very straight-forward and honest with me. I admire it in you; I respect you for it. Not many women would have the — er — courage to come out that way and say what they really think to a man.

— You've put your finger right on the spot when you say we live in different worlds. I know that. I realize it as fully as you do. I've known it from the beginning; as much when I first asked you to marry me as I did when I tried to ask you again night before last. I've taken all that into consideration. For the whole question in my mind — er — hinges on one or two things. What is your world and what is mine? And what does each amount to? What is your world like and what are you getting out of it? And mine — what is to be got from mine? Which offers more in happiness? When I ask you to be my wife, have I anything real to offer you? It simplifies itself down just like an advertising plan — er — I'm sorry, Chlo, I take that back, I didn't mean to ring in advertising. But that's the whole question in a nutshell: what have I to offer you . . . no, please let me finish. I heard you through. And I'll never bring this up again. I promise you.

— Frankly, Chlo, I — er — think my world has yours wiped off the map, if you'll pardon the phrase. And I'd like to change yours. That sounds presumptuous, I know. But I love you. I love you as much as any man ever loved a woman in this world. Why, I don't know. Everything about you appeals to me: Your fineness

and your pride; your stubbornness in what you think is right even though it may be against every convention. But something keeps you miserable. You've been battling yourself ever since I've known you. I couldn't help but see it. And it hurts me to see it — to see — er — so much beauty tear itself to bits and suffer so. For I love you. . . .

— Chlo, you've spoken very bluntly and frankly to me. And I'm going to do the same to you. Even if it ruins the slight chance I may still have left with you. . . . I'm not exactly a fool, you know. I know you haven't been allowing me to see you so much lately because my company was so welcome. I've known all along you were using me for some purpose of your own. Never mind, I was willing. If I could help you, whatever it was, I was willing and glad. But you know, it just occurred to me the other night what your purpose might be. And after what you have just said I'm dead certain. Maybe it's none of my business. I'm not trying to — er — pry into your secrets, but you've played with me, laughed at me, used me — and for once I'm going to have my say — whatever the consequences. I want a showdown. . . .

— You have been leading me to restaurants and plays these last several weeks simply on account of that artist chap over there. Evidently — er —

pardon me again — you are in love with him. What you are trying to do, I don't quite see, unless you're trying to wear him down and make him jealous. But this I do —

— I — I — I think you are — just about the most beastly man I know. It's perfectly ghastly of you to say a thing like that to me. You're a horrid cad. Please let go my wrist and call me a taxi. —

— No. Sit down. If you try to go, Chlo, I give you my word I'll make a scene. We've started this now and I'm going to see it through. . . . That's better. I'm sorry and I apologize from the bottom of my heart. Perhaps I'm a low-down mutt for doing this, Chlo. But I insist on your hearing my side. The only excuse I have is that I love you. That should be enough I think. You've put me off and put me off. And now I'm going to talk. . . .

— Yes, J. P., you'll do that; no one yet has ever been able to stop you when you started. —

— All right. . . . I want to take you back — a few years, Chlo, back to the time I was in college. I don't think I ever told you, but I paid every penny of my way for the four years I was there. I'm not proud of that, but it's an interesting fact, I think, because — er — both my parents were a bit bitter about it for a long time. They

figured I could have been better employed at some job where I was turning in a weekly envelope to them. When I graduated they thought differently. They wanted me to go on to study law. Their ambition was awakened. A lawyer in the family. I couldn't see it. I quit college. Do you know why, Chlo? Because I wanted to write. Yes, sir, I was fired to become a great writer. The law looked cheap to me. I felt about it something the way I imagine you feel about business and — er — selling now. Lawyers were nothing but clever tricksters. I'd go to work and support myself by any sort of job and write at night until I could support myself by my writings. I wouldn't even go on a newspaper because some one had told me that it would corrupt one's style. Those were great dreams I had, Chlo. And I was very happy over them at first. I was going to make the old world eat from my hand before I got through. . . .

— Why did you give it up? —

Angry? Was I in a temper a moment before? Not now. This is intensely interesting. J. P. of all men, with a secret ambition to write novels. Is he pulling some terrible joke on me. If he is — no, no, no. But he's the last. . . .

— Why, Chlo? That's what I'm trying to find words for now. It's rather difficult to explain.

A little while ago you spoke about all the ritual and bunk that surrounds business — Kiwanis and Rotary and ideals and speeches and service and — er — so on; and you jumped on all the things that most men seem to stand for to-day. Well — it just occurred to me one night to take stock of what I was trying to do. Why was I so keen to write? What did I have of any vital interest to tell the world? Not a damned thing. The only possible excuse I could have for writing is the same excuse that turns men into staunch Kiwanians and Rotarians, that makes them sing at a get-together banquet, that makes them talk so strongly of ideals and service, that gives the trickiest business man a glow of satisfaction aside from the money he makes in a deal. I wanted to *express* myself in some way; to — er — make myself stand for something; to be somebody. It's a dream every young man or woman with any sensibilities has: to burst through the monotonous round of the life they see their elders going through; to twist life to their own ends; to stand out head and shoulders above conventional ties that bind most people down to customs that have lost their meaning. Yes, sir, I'll wager that almost every girl or boy who hasn't, from the start, a strong bent towards some particular line of thinking or working, decides at some time or

other that he or she will be a great artist or writer. And sooner or later they get the decision knocked out of them. They have to go to work, to scratch for a living. Or they realize as I did, that, after all, there is only a handful of genius in a generation. The rest of these artist chaps and writers and musicians are just plain, everyday business men like me. But even at that very few men of any kind ever lose this — er — youthful ideal. In our office alone I bet if you could get at the inside of the whole staff you'd find that half of them still harbor the feeling that some day they are going to knock off and write America's great novel. A feeling, probably, they hardly dare express to themselves. It's this desire for expression that grinds out the Babbitts and Kiwanians and Rotarians you — er — run to earth so merrily. They're not aesthetes by a damned sight, these men. But, by George, I think it would be a difficult thing to prove that the basic emotion back of the point of view they're trying to put into their business hasn't got quite a bit of the same stuff that goes into the painting of a picture or the writing of a book. Does that sound a little absurd? Probably. We are not used to thinking of business men as artists. But take the most extreme case: an accountant. That looks like a hard and cold proposition, doesn't it?

And yet I can see how the handling of figures can give as great and beautiful a thrill to many men as the handling of brushes and paints to others; the thrill of harmony, balance, and perfect logic. . . .

—We look childish to you, do we, playing our games of selling and deliberately trying to outwit each other as we shake hands? But have you thought of this: that—er—the yearnings and desires you might have for your world may be equally childish? Here is this world, made as it is; and here we are made as we are. We are all—every damned one—just alike at bottom, pushed by very much the same motives. Very few of us ever grow up completely—which is probably a good thing—so we go on playing just as we did as children. The difference is that we play different games. Something new comes into life as we grow older: the necessity of making a living. The whole question is how are you going to play the game of life? Kick against the rules and worry about fair play and get sore because you're losing, or are you going to jump into it for all you're worth? Usually we jump into it—without thinking. And, by George, that's why I'm so strong for jazz and the motor car and the radio and everything that goes with them. Because it's making a better and more complete

sport and game of life all the time. Even the depression has been in many ways an adventure. It's pushed boredom into the background. And believe me, boredom is the worst enemy this world has to fight. It always has been and always will be. Boredom more than everything else combined turns the mind in on itself and starts trouble.

— This world is not just what I would have it had I been the maker, Chlo. But being such as it is, there's one thing I'm mighty glad I discovered: that the best way to get anything out of it is to be a — er — contemporary of your time. To live as life is being lived around you, to throw yourself in the midst of the maelstrom and be whirled around in it. And that's my whole philosophy in a nutshell: be a con-tem-po-rary. I'd certainly rather be in the midst of things than hang on the outside sneering. I've heard you say you hate the noise and bustle and bang of things, but it's — it's — inspiring, I tell you, if you are living in your time. For then it doesn't hurt your ears — you're a part of it. Bunk? Of course. But two-thirds of everything is bunk. And where will you find it different? England with its king and parades of royalty — was anything ever more bunk than the divine right of kings? Take it apart and look at it for a second:

one of the silliest superstitions in the world. In France — that flashy, money-bitten little land of hard-boiled shopkeepers and illiterate peasants. All this highbrow talk of French culture is more bunk. They think in the past. Most of our religious beliefs, too, are bunk. And our modern artists and novelists parading their dirty minds for us to applaud — that's bunk. But what can you do about it? It takes thousands of years sometimes for one little bit of bunk to wear itself out of a job before anything is found to — er — replace it. I tell you, Chlo, you must accept *some* things at face value whether or not. Any logic ends in absurdity or sidetracks itself sooner or later.

— And marriage, Chlo, simmers right down to the same problem. It looks dull and prosaic as a day-after-day affair, perhaps. But you can't beat the game; in the long run you can't beat it. I tell you, Chlo, from the bottom of my heart, I don't believe any one on earth in a civilized society ever beat it and got away with it. No matter how strong and self-sufficient, sooner or later loneliness stalks in. And it must be a — er — frightful thing to grow old without a companion. I know I don't want to grow old alone. Neither religion nor philosophy nor money can supply the goal that will take the place of sharing your

ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR

all with some one right here and now. Monotonous and dull it may be, and a gamble, but there's nothing ever been found to take its place, that's certain. —

Chlo was sitting up. Her body was bent forward and her hands gripped the side of the bed as she looked with intent concentration across the narrow space at the vague, shadowy outlines of the bed opposite whence issued at regular intervals of slight duration, the audible breathing of a heavy sleeper. She sat, motionless.

—And so—and so, Chlo, I'm asking you to marry me. I love you and I believe I can make you happy. Perhaps it's a gamble, but it's a gamble that is worth taking. I don't mean a gamble on my part; I'm sure of the way I feel.

I mean a gamble for you, and I say so frankly because I don't want to attempt to force you into something against your will and which you may be sorry for later. But we have so much to give each other and that's what counts. You have a fineness, an — er — innate culture, an instinct for the right thing, the beautiful thing, a — a something, Chlo, I don't know how to say it — I've never tried to think this out before or put it into words — but something I've missed all my life. I haven't spent much of my time reclining on a bed of roses and I know I'm pretty crude and rough and tumble when it comes to a lot of, but — well, you know what I mean — things that count with you. I'm decent at bottom, I think, Chlo, and I know I haven't got much to offer you that you're interested in. I don't mean exactly that either, but — but — dammit — what I mean to say is: I'm lonely, Chlo, I'm so downright, deadly lonely that nothing else means anything at all with you out of the picture. I've still got plenty of money. I could retire to-morrow if I wanted, but what's the use? I wouldn't get any kick out of it, and as it is I feel sometimes like I'm in a treadmill, walking around and around in a circle. I want a companion. I want you. I want to share what I have with you. I want to give to you, and I want you to teach me. For I

know you're lonely, too, Chlo. I can't help but see it, and I'm miserable when I see you unhappy. What do you want to do? What would you like to do? Where would you like to go? Let me help you, Chlo. No—help me. Let's don't pass marriage by—give me a chance to show my love for you. All that I've worked and struggled over—I never quite realized before—but it was just for this: for you, for us. Let's don't lose it, Chlo, let's don't play with a chance at happiness just for some ideas that have never been proved. Let's live in our time where we belong. You don't want to go on living as you do now. Three girls cooped in a flat, working in offices all day, back to their flat every evening—you—you are too—er—much of a person to be submerged that way, too big, too precious, to waste your gifts in such a struggle.

—I make no demands, I exact nothing, Chlo, I want to give you the freedom to expand as you want, to make your own happiness, to write if you wish, to study or play as you will. Only I beg—and I'm begging from the bottom of my heart—for the chance to offer you the happiness that I believe can lie in a normal, sane married life. Am I making a fool of myself? I've never asked a woman to marry me before. I've never begged this way for anything from any one before. But I

have no shame about my feeling; it's honest and no fly-by-night. I need you. I know I'm not worth kissing the tip of your shoe. I know you laugh at me. I know I get on your nerves sometimes — but I'm willing to make every effort a man can make to make you happy. I don't know, Chlo — I've been in love with you ever since I first met you in the office. I was afraid to admit it to myself for a long time. You seemed so cool and aloof, you made me feel awkward, and I've wanted so much to show up well before you that it sort of made me — er — self-conscious and say the wrong things and look like a fool. That's because I've loved you so much, I think. I'm not such a machine as you have put me down. I want you. I need you. And somehow — I don't know — I feel we need each other. Give me a chance, Chlo. Give me the chance to try to make you happy; that's all I —

What is he doing to me? I have been blindly and hopelessly feeling my way through a cloudy maze of treacherous growth and suddenly I stumble forth on firm ground warmed by the clear, sane light of a brilliant sun. That is the feeling that grows within me as I listen to J. P. Life seems all at once so simple and so — so what? Worth while. Yes, it seems to loom before me rich with a meaning. I dream — a dream with-

out words, without thought — an emotion, vague, indefinable. Yet so overpowering that for once no fear of its honesty invades. I can see it all so clearly now. That was the first photograph my mind snapped, I can see it all so clearly now. He is right. I have been playing with fire. Frittering. Living in a world that never was and never can be. I have avoided facts, have been afraid of them. Gordon? His bare studio. Bare, drab walls with one lone painting of — of shapeless women bathing. It's unhealthy. It's — there's something — it's wrong — it's not sane. Choking. How could I have ever dreamed of — no, no, why it would have been impossible. How long could such an abnormal relationship have lasted? Marriage and a normal life, a contemporary life. What more is there? After all — great heavens, how J. P.'s words did turn me inside out that night. He was a great calm man seeing life wisely and whole. He was sanity and rest; a mighty oak that resisted storms and sheltered. Good Lord. And I. I strayed and tired and sick of — oh! And then —

There is Gordon standing over our table staring down at me, pale, grim. Yes, there is Gordon. I look at him and am not surprised. I do not question why he has left his table — and his girl — and why he stands there looking down at me grimly. He is there and it does not make any

difference. Am I in a trance? Gordon means so little to me at that minute. There are other things. Marriage and sanity and contemporaries. And there is Gordon staring at me and I wait for him to speak. No, I do not wait. I merely sit looking at him and he is not clear to me for I am partly elsewhere.

— Chlo, I surrender. I give up. I have stood it as long as I can. I want you too much. I'll do anything you say. I don't know whether you've haunted me purposely or not, but never mind, dear, you win. Send this fellow home and I'll shoot Peggie on her way—I must talk to you now, dear—

J. P. is on his feet.

—I beg your pardon, sir, just what do you mean by this high-handed ordering?—

Gordon does not shift his gaze from my eyes. He answers softly.

—Miss Harding is my *fiancée*, and I am very, very anxious to speak to her alone.—

They are standing before me, Gordon and J. P. I see them sharply outlined before me, waiting. But I am only partly there. A great light is shining within me. Sanity and a normal life. Contemporary.

—I'm sorry, Gordon, I'm going to marry Mr. Mitchell.—

Can there be such a thing as mind? What is it? When does it show itself? Can our actions be more than simply automatic? All my ideas and plans twisted and broken in an instant. A thoughtless, emotional instant. How could I? How could I? And yet — the days that followed. I was happy. I was scared but I was happy. At last I'm being sensible, I repeated to myself again and again, I am being sensible and normal. And Cordie and Willa were so pleased and thought it so wonderful. The excitement, the rush, they overwhelmed me. No, damn it, Chlo, be honest wth yourself for once in your life. You merely went into it as you do everything. Through expediency. The easiest way out. Yes, that's the whole thing. I suppose I saw a simple way of shifting my troubles. My troubles! My troubles . . . troubles . . . troub . . .

Daylight pouring through old-fashioned French windows fell upon two figures lying fast asleep in twin beds. In the morning glow the walls of the room showed a soft cream against the blue-white woodwork and lofty ceiling. A dark blue rug covered

the floor and the curtains were of heavy gold silk gauze. The room was old and had an air of repose. A faint breeze stirred the curtains.

Suddenly a woman sat up in one of the beds. She stretched out her arms, stifled a yawn, said, Oh, dear! and bent over to look at a small clock sitting on the nearby table.

— Oh, dear! she exclaimed a second time and jumped out of bed. As she threw on her kimono and rushed towards the bathroom, she stopped on the way to give a quick tug at the tousled hair of a man lying in the other bed.

— Hey, get up, old darling, it's awfully late. —

She leaned over, gave him a hurried kiss on the nose and fluttered out of the room.

The man lay on his back gazing at the high ceiling. He heard the woman humming to herself in the bathroom and grinned.

Before he had finished bathing and dressing, the woman called from the other end of the apartment.

— Oh, J. P., breakfast is on the table. —

— Coming, Chlo.

As the man pulled back his chair and picked up the morning paper, the woman remarked, — what a beautiful day! It was so terrifically hot last night. I couldn't get to sleep for a long time. I thought I'd smother. The heat made me jittery. —

Breakfast over, the couple walked arm in arm to the door.

— What are you doing to-day? —

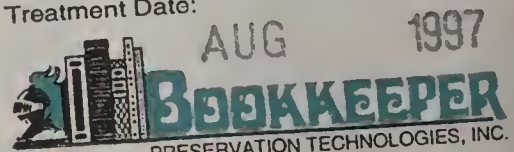
— Oh, I thought I'd do a little shopping later this morning, then drop by the office and pick you up for lunch. —

They kissed.

— Okay. Good bye, dear. —

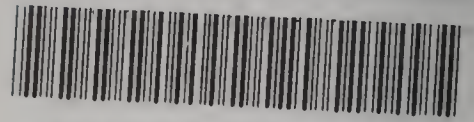
— Good bye, dear. —

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